



Office of Charter Schools

NC ACCESS PROGRAM

NC Department of Public Instruction

ANNUAL REVIEW

2021

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A MESSAGE FROM THE NC ACCESS TEAM

Few challenges will ever stand up to the enormity of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students, families, leaders, and schools across the nation were confronted not only with a new way of operating, but also with the realities of inequity that, while always present, were exacerbated by the crisis. Access to broadband internet left many students without reliable remote learning capabilities; school closures worsened food scarcity for families reliant on school meals; isolation created social emotional and mental health challenges that affected all students in vastly different ways. But through the last year, educators around the country stepped up. Educators in North Carolina stepped up.

The NC ACCESS Program is designed to support the needs of educationally disadvantaged students. By putting an intentional focus on recruiting and serving these students, while also removing barriers like transportation and lunch service, subgrantees proved that, even through a once-in-a-century pandemic, they can create more equitable learning spaces for all students.

We're now halfway into the 5-year initiative, and the results are showing. More educationally disadvantaged students are being served throughout the state. More buses are running daily to help

reduce transportation barriers. More lunches are being provided to those who need it. And maybe more importantly, amazing things are happening in schools that data can't capture.

We are so proud of the work that leaders are putting in every day to achieve the ambitious goals of this program. Each month we get to see, through the intensive development of the Fellowship, how leaders are pushing themselves and each other to rethink how to best meet the needs of all students.

Subgrantees across the state are laying the foundation for what long-term, sustainable equity looks like beyond COVID-19 and beyond the NC ACCESS Program. At the same time, they are creating and sharing best practices that can inform and support all schools across the state to do the same.

Forty-two schools are implementing subgrants, with more on the way. Over 20,000 students are already being served, and that number will only continue to grow. The conversations about how to serve every single student in the best way are happening across the state. And we could not be more excited to continue this journey.



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\$36.6 MILLION.

60 EXCELLENT SCHOOLS.

160 TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS.

NC ACCESS PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The North Carolina Office of Charter Schools is over two years into implementing a five-year, \$36.6 million Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Through the grant, the NC ACCESS Program was established to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged (ED) students attending high-quality charter schools; develop a cohort of charter school leaders who can develop and demonstrate best practices in serving educationally disadvantaged students; and broadly disseminate best practices in serving educationally disadvantaged students and foster collaboration in the charter school community and between charter schools and traditional public schools.

In 2018, North Carolina was awarded \$26.6 million to award 50 school-level subgrants and create a cohort of 100 leaders who would develop and demonstrate best practices that could be shared across the state. After the initial launch and early success of the program, the U.S. Department of Education awarded North Carolina an additional \$10 million to expand the reach of the program and ultimately award 60 subgrants and grow the cohort of leaders to 160.

Through two years, the NC ACCESS Program has already awarded over \$20 million dollars in subgrant funding for schools committed to recruiting, retaining, and serving educationally disadvantaged students, defined as students who are economically disadvantaged, student experiencing homelessness and/or unaccompanied youth, English learners, students with disabilities, immigrant students, and migrant students.

In addition to providing resources and support for schools, the NC ACCESS Program has made major investments in the development of equity-focused charter school leaders across the state. By June 30, 2021, 111 school leaders will have completed the ACCESS Fellowship, a year-long leadership development program focused on building capacity to better serve educationally disadvantaged student subgroups.

The NC ACCESS Program's investment in leaders is not limited to schools receiving subgrants. The Visiting Fellows Program and Aspiring Minority School Leaders Program are providing specific support to more charter school leaders; additional statewide professional development is free and open to all leaders across the state; and a library of best practices and strategies developed by ACCESS Fellows is available to the public through the NC ACCESS website. (ncaccessprogram.com)

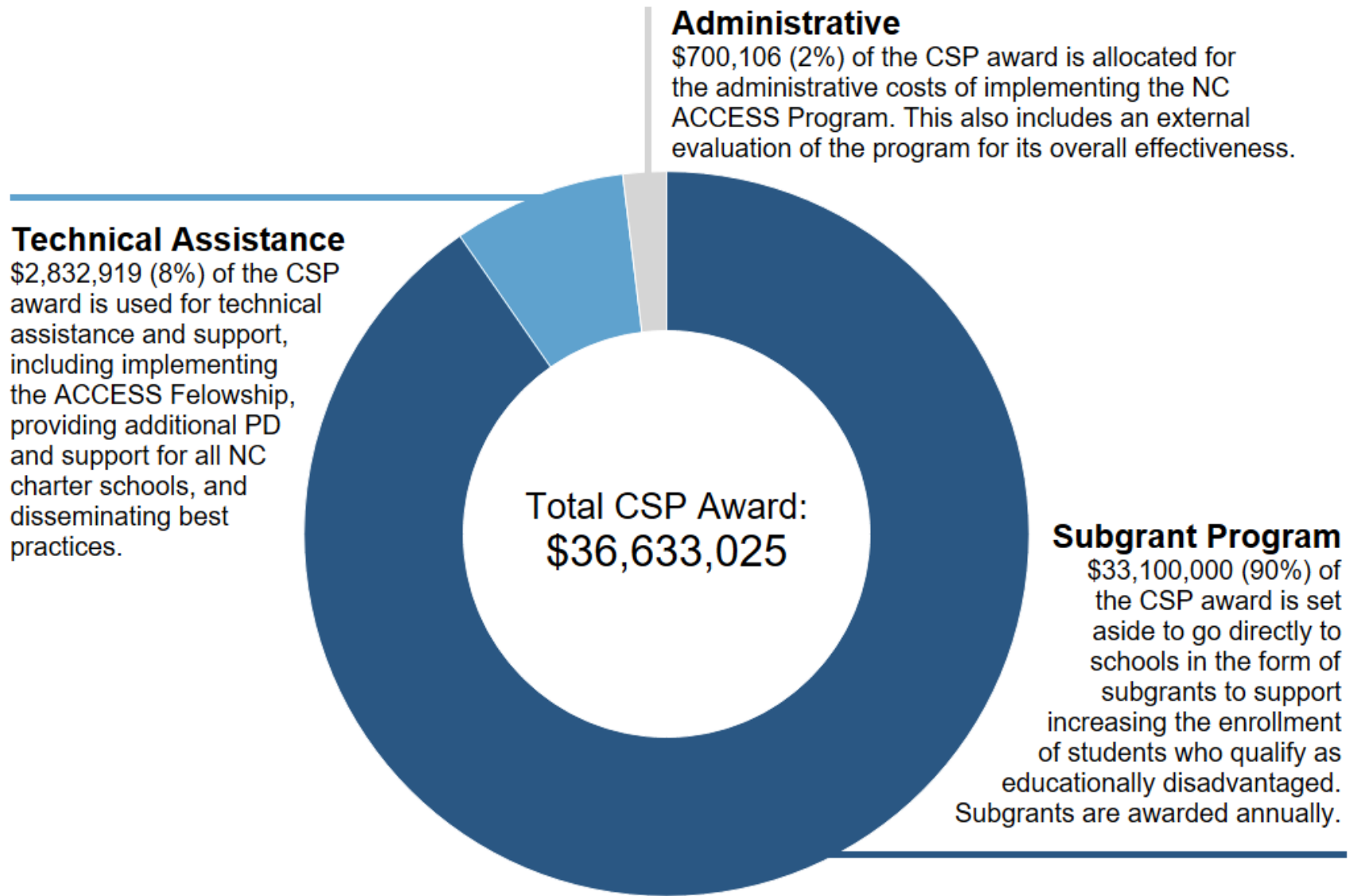
Through funding, monitoring, and support, the NC ACCESS Program aims to ensure North Carolina charter schools better serve educationally disadvantaged students across the state.

“Too often in our country, school choice has been limited to those that have the means to buy a house in a wealthy zip code or send their children to private school. The NC ACCESS Program will increase equity by expanding educational options for parents regardless of their race or income.”

— Alex Quigley, Chair, NC Charter Schools Advisory Board

How is the NC ACCESS Program funded?

The NC ACCESS Program is funded through a 5-year, \$36.6 million federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) award. There are 3 main components of funding in all federal CSP awards: administrative costs, technical assistance, and subgrants.



2020-2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

Cohort 1 Expands their Reach. During the 2019-2020 school year, Cohort 1 subgrantees added nearly 800 new seats and served 250 more educationally disadvantaged students. Building on that success, those nine Cohort 1 schools added over 1,100 more high-quality seats and served 520 more educationally disadvantaged students in the 2020-2021 school year, even while transitioning to virtual learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second Round of Subgrants Awarded. In the summer of 2020, 33 schools were awarded a combined \$16.8 million during the second cycle of subgrant awards, bringing the total investment of subgrant funding to \$20.2 million across 42 schools. Learn more on page 10.

ACCESS Fellowship Cohort 2 Launches. In August 2020, 78 new Fellows began their ACCESS Fellowship experience, bringing the total number of current and former Fellows to 111. Due to COVID-19, the second Fellowship cohort was conducted entirely virtually. Among the group of leaders were 12 Visiting Fellows from 10 non-subgrantee charter schools and 2 district schools using the state's Restart Model. Learn more on page 19.

NC ACCESS Program Website Launches. In October 2020, ncaccessprogram.com officially launched with information and resources for serving educationally disadvantaged students. On the site visitors can learn about applying for subgrant funding, register for free professional development, search a library of best practices, and discover more about the NC ACCESS Program. Learn more on page 28.

Aspiring Minority School Leaders Program Launches. In January 2021, 13 aspiring leaders of color began coursework at Appalachian State University to obtain their NC School Administrators License. Learn more on page 23.

First Round of Statewide Professional Development Offered. Between January – May 2021, 24 sessions with over 60 hours of PD were offered free of charge to any charter school leaders or staff across the state. The equity-focused sessions were attended by over 300 people and focused on serving students experiencing poverty, exceptional children, students of color, and much more. Learn more on page 26.

Third Annual Subgrant Application Cycle is Completed. In March 2021, 22 applications for subgrant funding were submitted to the NC ACCESS Program. Ultimately, 19 of those applications were recommended for approval.

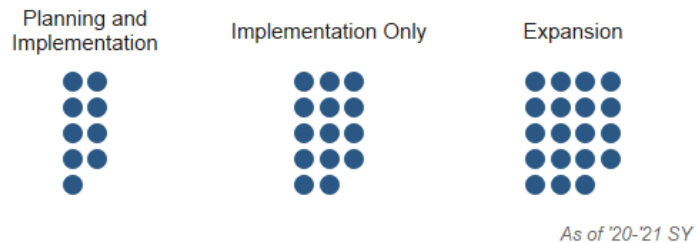
NC ACCESS Program Participates in Federal Monitoring Visit. In May 2021, the U.S. Department of Education and WestEd completed a scheduled monitoring review of the NC ACCESS Program's implementation of the CSP Grant.



SUBGRANT PROGRAM

The first overarching goal of the NC ACCESS Program is to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students served by high quality NC charter schools. By the end of year five, over \$33 million will be awarded to schools committed to better serving educationally disadvantaged students in their communities. Annually, eligible charter schools are invited to apply for funding in one of four categories: Planning and Implementation, Implementation Only, Expansion, and Replication. Schools must complete a competitive application process to demonstrate their commitment and plans for serving more educationally disadvantaged students to be awarded.

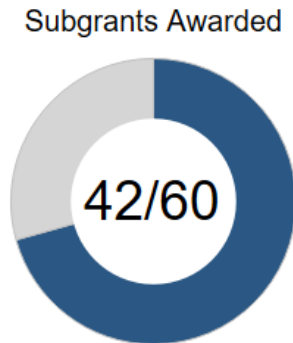
Subgrantees Awarded in Each Category



Nine schools have received subgrants in the Planning and Implementation category, which is for newly approved schools that will be entering the planning year to prepare for opening and operating their charter school. Fourteen schools have been awarded Implementation Only subgrants, which is for schools operating less than three years, but with a track record of success. Finally, nineteen schools have received subgrants for Expansion, which is for high-quality schools operating for more than three years. No schools have been awarded a Replication subgrant yet.

To date, two cycles of subgrants have been awarded to 42 charter schools throughout North Carolina, which puts the Program ahead of schedule to award 60 subgrants over five years.

The 42 schools that are receiving NC ACCESS subgrant funding have been collectively awarded \$20.2 million and are in various stages of implementation.



After year 1, all three planning and implementation schools in Cohort 1 opened their doors to over 500 students.

Newly operating schools receiving Implementation Only awards and established Expansion schools in Cohort 1 successfully transitioned to year 2 in the Program, adding another combined 650 students to their enrollments. Together with the addition of Cohort 2, NC ACCESS subgrantees added over 3,300 additional seats and served over 20,000 students across 22 counties during the 2020-2021 school year.

Total Students Served by Subgrantees



**Cohort 1 includes 9 subgrantees and Cohort 2 includes 33. Not all schools have opened for students yet.*

Creating a Statewide Network

NC ACCESS Program subgrantees span the state of NC. During the 2020-2021 school year, forty-two (42) subgrantee schools were implementing across twenty-two (22) counties. Through the ACCESS Fellowship and other professional opportunities, these schools have begun to create a collaborative network of leaders and schools committed to serving more educationally disadvantaged students.

Number of Subgrantees



Alamance	Alamance Community School			
Buncombe	ArtSpace Charter			
	Asheville PEAK Academy			
	Invest Collegiate - Imagine			
Columbus	Davis Academy	Lincoln	Lincoln Charter School	
Cumberland	Alpha Academy	Mecklenburg	Bonnie Cone Classical Academy	
Forsyth	Arts Based School		Bradford Preparatory School	
Gaston	Community Public Charter		Community School of Davidson	Rutherford
	Ridgeview Charter School		East Voyager Academy	Union
Guilford	Guilford Preparatory Academy		Lakeside Charter Academy	Apprentice Academy HS of NC
	Next Generation Academy		Movement School Eastland	Monroe Charter Academy
	Summit Creek Academy		Queen City STEM School	Wake
	Triad Math and Science Academy		Sugar Creek Charter	Cardinal Charter Acad at Wendell Falls
Halifax	Hobgood Charter School		Telra Institute	The Exploris School
Harnett	Achievement Charter Academy	Montgomery	Tillery Charter Academy	Torchlight Academy
Iredell	American Renaissance School	New Hanover	Wilmington School of the Arts	Wake Preparatory Academy
Lee	MINA Charter School of Lee County	Perquimans	Elaine Riddick Charter School	Watauga
				Two Rivers Community School
				Wilson
				Sallie B Howard School
				Wilson Preparatory Academy

*Planning year schools not pictured: Huntersville Charter School (Mecklenburg County); North Oak Academy (Durham County).



REMOVING BARRIERS FOR ALL STUDENTS

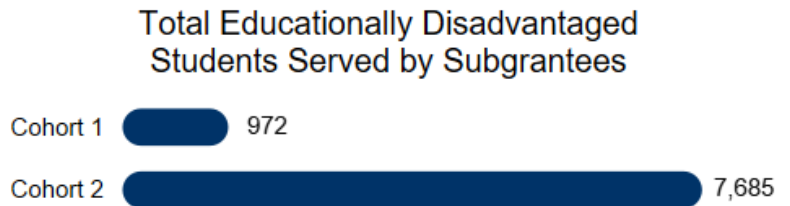
Schools that receive subgrants are invested in a long-term effort to better serve educationally disadvantaged students. Recruiting and enrolling these students and families is as much about building relationships as it is about removing barriers to access. The NC ACCESS Program is an opportunity for schools to engage in best practice strategies like weighted lotteries, intentional marketing and recruitment plans, access to transportation, and lunch affordability. In fact, all subgrantees are required to develop and implement those specific practices to help support student access and to reach their enrollment and diversity goals.

School demographics do not change overnight, or even in one year. The long-term, sustainable practices subgrantee schools are implementing will help to shape the enrollment trends for years to come, but the results are already starting to show. After the first year, six Cohort 1 schools increased their enrollments of educationally disadvantaged students by 250. After year 2, both cohorts of subgrantees reported serving an additional 1,485 educationally disadvantaged students, bringing the total EDS population to 8,657, which is about 41% of the total population.

The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic were vast. Many schools planned to go out into their communities to engage directly with educationally disadvantaged students and families. Some subgrantees used funding to partner with outreach coordinators and bilingual community liaisons that would spearhead these efforts. Even though many gatherings and social activities were not possible, these schools did make progress and are now positioned for greater impact next year.

In addition to marketing and recruitment, one required strategy subgrantees must implement is a weighted admissions lottery. Weighted lotteries are State Board-approved policies to provide a higher statistical chance (i.e. additional weight) to students who qualify as educationally disadvantaged to increase the likelihood they are selected in the lottery. While weighted lotteries share the general principle that they can support enrollment of specific categories of educational disadvantage, they can look different at each school.

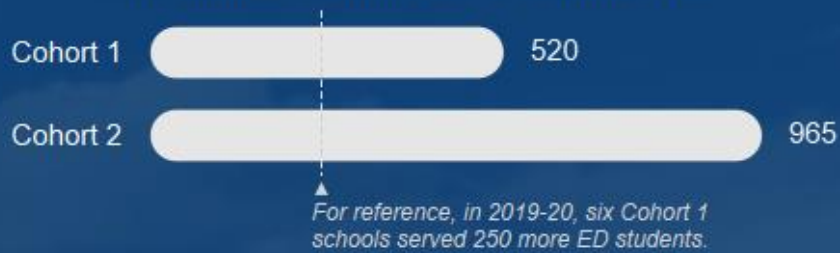
All schools ensure that some percentage of seats will go toward educationally disadvantaged students, or that those students receive 1.5 or 2 times the weight of non-EDS students to increase their enrollment chances. Sugar Creek Charter School in Charlotte, NC uses an even more intentional and targeted approach. For every ED category a student qualifies for, they receive additional weight. This allows a school like Sugar Creek, which has a large waitlist and already serves a high economically disadvantaged population, to target additional subgroups, like English learners experiencing poverty or homelessness, with even greater chances of admission.



**EDS enrollment for Cohort 1 (9 schools) represents 28% of overall enrollment and Cohort 2 (33 schools) represents 44%. Not all schools have opened yet.*

How many more educationally disadvantaged* students did subgrantees serve last year?

Net increase reported by Cohort 1 (9 schools) and Cohort 2 (25 schools) for the 2020-21 school year.

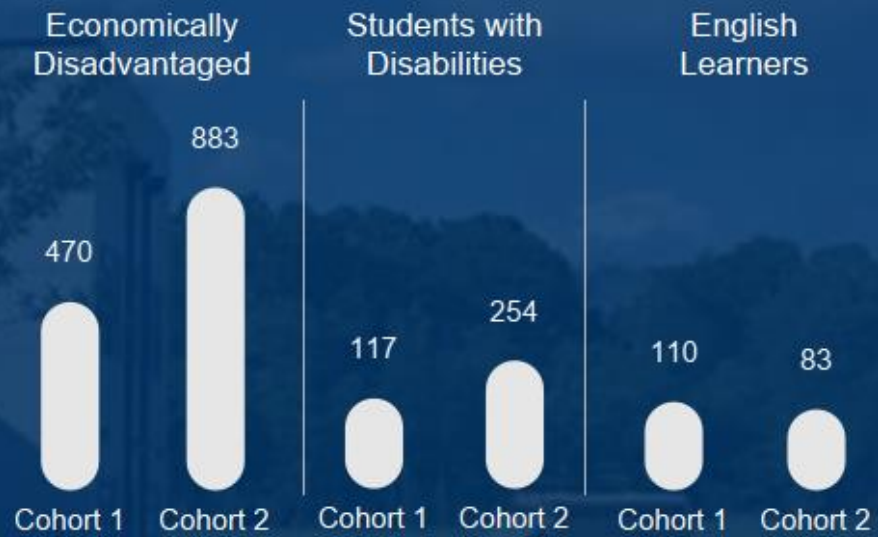


Two of the biggest economic barriers for families are access to daily meal services and reliable transportation. Currently, 100% of participating subgrantee schools have submitted plans for lunch and transportation and 50% of subgrantees have already fully developed and implemented those plans, even after just one or two years. Some schools, like those in the planning year, are not expected to have fully implemented in the first year, and while the pandemic also created challenges to implementation during the last school year, these numbers will only continue to rise as schools move further into implementation.

While economically disadvantaged students make up the bulk of the educationally disadvantaged populations served by subgrantees, there are other classifications that schools are committed to recruiting and better serving. Many subgrantees have also made recruiting and serving English learners and students with disabilities a prominent focus of their efforts. Specifically, for English learners, subgrantees have invested in adding staff to serve as bilingual community outreach liaisons. In this regard, marketing strategies shared through the Program have been incredibly valuable tools for providing information to non-English speaking families about the supports the schools provide for their students.

One Fellow summed up the impact, saying, “We started transportation this year, and we really improved on our lunch program, but I think a bigger thing for us was adding a position for someone who is very connected to the Hispanic community and is helping families that are interested, but also ones that are already here. And so, we’ve seen a huge increase in our relationships with our Hispanic families.”

How many of those new educationally disadvantaged students enrolled in 2020-2021 qualified as...



Enrollments of students experiencing homelessness, migrant students, and immigrant students increased by a combined 81 students across both cohorts.

*Educationally disadvantaged is a distinct count of every student that qualifies for any category of educational disadvantage.

On top of the major investments subgrantees are making in the infrastructure of removing barriers to access, they also know that simply enrolling more educationally disadvantaged students is just the first step. Providing equitable educational environments that allow every student to thrive academically comes next.

The NC ACCESS Program has helped participating schools also focus on academic supports to meet the needs of their educationally disadvantaged students. Not only has the Program supported Fellows with professional development, but funding has made it possible to add curriculum supplies and materials, instructional technology resources, and increased teacher training to help their students reach academic proficiency. These supports even extend to providing guidance counseling and mental health services to support students' social and emotional well-being.

Taken together, the intentional focus and implementation of strategies made by subgrantees are helping to reshape and reimagine certain aspects of their operational and academic programs to support the needs of their growing and diversifying student populations.

Long-term, this means new and innovative approaches at North Carolina charter schools that cultivate and embrace student populations that are diverse across class, language proficiency, culture, race, and more.

SUBGRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

SUGAR CREEK CHARTER SCHOOL

Providing transportation to all of the students in a charter school can be quite challenging for both urban and rural schools, large and small, and developing an equitable and sustainable transportation model takes time and requires flexibility as a school grows. Sugar Creek is a large charter school in the Charlotte area that has been operating and growing since 1999. They currently serve over 1,600 K-12 students (78% of whom qualify as educationally disadvantaged) and provide transportation services to roughly 80%.

When they first opened, Sugar Creek contracted with a transportation company using 8 buses to pick up and drop off students. As enrollment grew, they slowly began to purchase their own buses, and now have a fleet of 30. The buses collect students at shuttle stops that are no more than one mile from their home, and school leaders indicated that this has been a very effective way to provide transportation for all of the student population.

One key challenge that was identified by Sugar Creek and other charter schools was finding and retaining reliable bus drivers. As the school continues to grow, rather than buy more buses which would require more drivers, the school will implement staggered start times for the elementary, middle, and high school in order to maximize their capacity to provide transportation services to every student that needs it.

SUBGRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

ARTSPACE CHARTER SCHOOL

Marketing to and recruiting diverse student populations proves to be difficult for many charter schools, especially those in rural counties. “Spreading the word about not only what we do, but helping people understand that charter schools are not private schools, that everyone has the opportunity, [is challenging].”

ArtSpace, a small K-8 charter school in western North Carolina, has developed a comprehensive marketing strategy to encourage traditionally marginalized populations to attend the school. This includes social media marketing on Facebook and Instagram as well as printed advertisements that appear in local newspapers and magazines. But most importantly, it involves conversations.

Representatives from the school reach out directly to local leaders and businesses in the communities they serve and have developed strong relationships with Black and Hispanic leaders and businesses. “[We are] also reaching out literally to the people that are in our neighborhood and getting to know them and helping them understand that their families are welcome and encouraged to attend.”

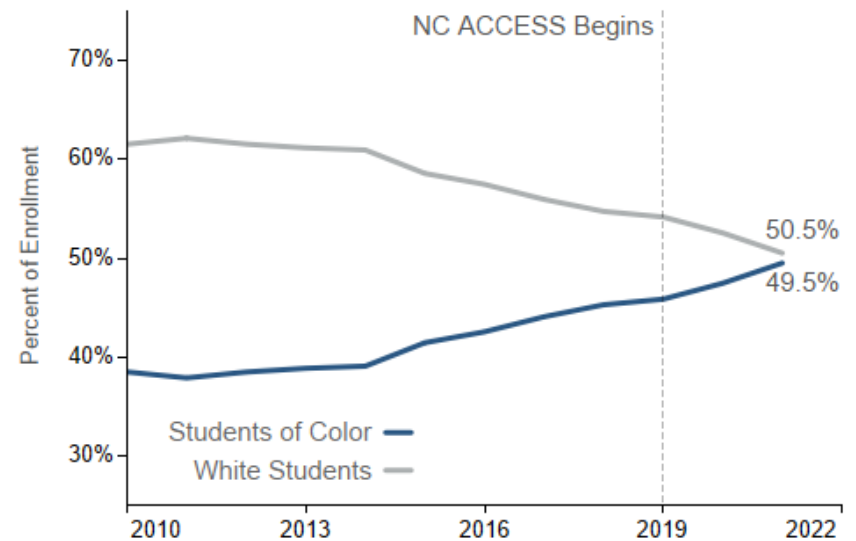
Community connections like this are one of the most effective ways to gain the trust of the educationally disadvantaged student populations NC ACCESS subgrantees wish to serve, “and so getting our kids out in these places and meeting people and having us continue the conversations with leaders in the community has been very productive and it comes from a heart space. You see their passion for what they're doing.”

The NC ACCESS Program does not have specific racial diversity goals, since weighted lotteries cannot account for race. However, the broader effort to diversify the North Carolina charter sector is being accelerated by subgrantees in the NC ACCESS Program.

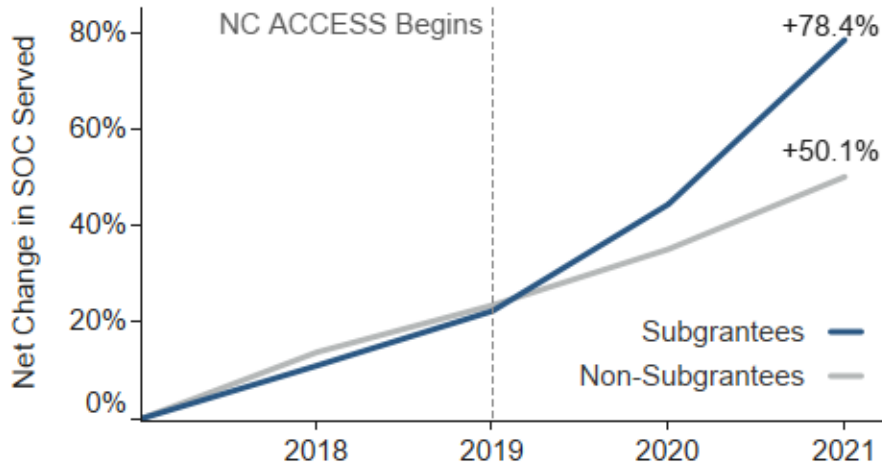
Educational disadvantages are not limited to any race; however, the data is proof that we cannot ignore the connections and correlations. In many areas, though not all, higher percentages of Black students are experiencing poverty and higher percentages of Hispanic and Latinx students are English learners. Diversifying schools by class, English language proficiency, and other factors, also means diversifying schools by race. Subgrantees have made specific commitments to racial diversity and are leading the diversification of the NC charter sector.

The Diversifying Charter Sector

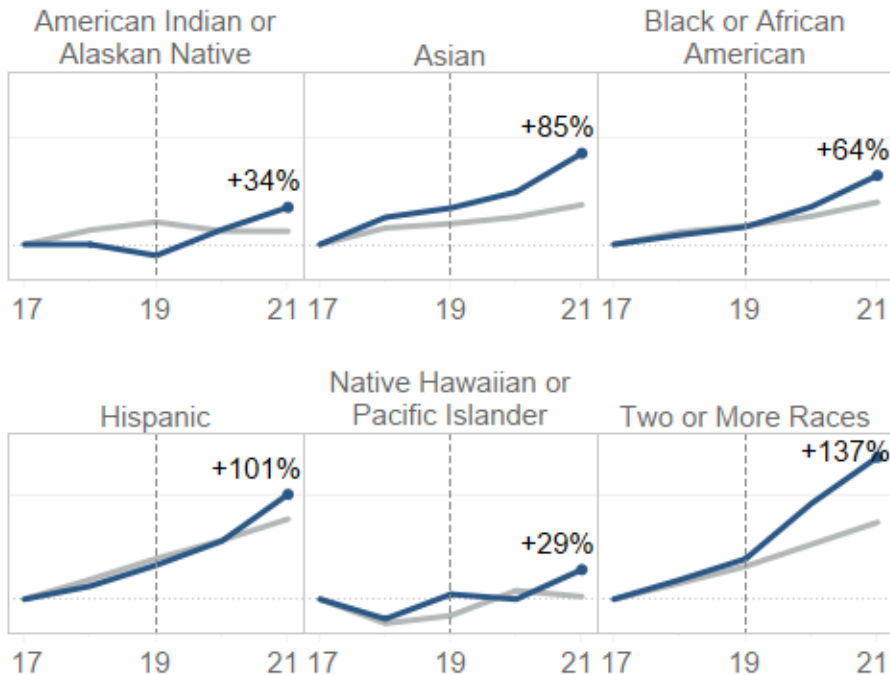
Over the last decade, charter schools have steadily increased the number of Students of Color they serve, nearly equaling the number of White students served during the 2020-2021 school year.



While charter schools overall are steadily growing more diverse, subgrantees are adding Students of Color (SOC) at a faster rate than non-subgrantees, enrolling nearly 80% more SOC since 2017.



A closer look reveals every non-White student subgroup is growing at a faster rate in subgrantee schools than non-subgrantees.



SUBGRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

TRIAD MATH AND SCIENCE ACADEMY

Ensuring all eligible students that qualify for a free and reduced priced lunch program receive services is difficult for many schools, both district and charter. Triad Math and Science Academy, a large K-12 charter school in Guilford County, serves over 1,200 students (49% educationally disadvantaged) and utilizes the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program, which allows schools to provide free breakfast and lunch to 100% of their students.

In order to qualify for this program, a school must be located in an economically depressed area where 40% or more of the students are considered low income. For qualifying schools, no paperwork is collected from families and no tracking of unpaid lunch accounts.

“So they use a radius, and based on the radius that they used for where our school is located, they said we have about 60% of families in that area seemed that they were qualified for reduced or disadvantaged families, and so we're going to give it to your whole school. So, we then provide free lunch for the entire school.”

There are several potential benefits of this program for both the school, students, and families including nutritious food available to all students, streamlined meal services, reduction in administrative time and costs, and no paperwork which may be stigmatizing for families and cumbersome for schools.

For many, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed just how important daily food services from schools can be for families experiencing poverty and food insecurity.

The NC ACCESS grant funding is critically important for any school to meet its goals and support all students to success and equitable access for educationally disadvantaged students. But I want to speak about the hidden gems of the NC ACCESS grant which benefited our school this year. Foremost, the training and fellowship of leaders has had a profound impact on our school's ability to meet the challenges of developing equity in programming, policy, and practice. Sharing expertise and supporting leaders as they work against the status quo in education is an important aspect of the Fellowship cohort. These "courageous conversations" must be nurtured and protected to allow us each to learn and grow, just as we do with students.

Another hidden gem was taking concrete action in policy. The program supported our work toward providing a weighted lottery for students, providing increased access to educationally disadvantaged students. As a successful charter school, we annually have large waiting lists which can discourage and reduce access for some families. The weighted lottery allows us to provide more access.

Finally, the program has allowed us to support one of our teachers to pursue her pathway to leadership. Supporting minority educators into roles of school leadership is an important aspect of equity in education made possible by the NC ACCESS grant.

-Robin Hollis, The Arts-Based School

DEVELOPING LEADERS FOR EQUITY

The second overarching goal of the NC ACCESS Program is to develop and implement a Fellowship Institute for 160 charter school leaders who can develop and demonstrate best practices for serving educationally disadvantaged students. The ACCESS Fellowship is a yearlong, immersive professional development program for leaders of schools awarded subgrants to learn, develop, and demonstrate best practices in serving educationally disadvantaged students and foster collaboration within the charter school community and between charter and traditional public schools. Fellowship sessions include opportunities to build supportive and collaborative networks, share best practices, and engage in critical conversations with state and national experts who have experience in leadership best practices, developing, expanding, and replicating successful high-quality schools, and working with educationally disadvantaged populations.

In addition to subgrantees, the NC ACCESS Program developed and launched the Visiting Fellows Program to provide an opportunity for non-eligible charter school leaders to participate in the Fellowship Institute as a Visiting Fellow for one year. The purpose is to provide the visiting school leaders with a range of experiences to develop the critical competencies needed to work with staff, parents, board members, and the community to create a high-performance learning environment. Each year, the NC ACCESS Program invites a mix of high-performing school leaders from schools not currently eligible to apply for a subgrant. Included in the Visiting Fellows are the Aspiring Minority School Leaders (learn more on page 23) and leaders from district schools using the state's Restart Model.

Two cohorts, totaling 111 leaders, from across the state have completed their Fellowship experience so far, with more on the way. In just 2 years, Fellows have engaged with each other and numerous partner organizations including the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching, Educational Equity Institute, Aha! Process, Inc., Rural Opportunity Institute, UNC Charlotte Cato College of Education, and more.

Though COVID-19 forced the entire 2020-2021 Fellowship to be conducted virtually, Fellows still met monthly to collaborate and learn from experts about topics like barriers to educational equity; understanding Hispanic/Latino families and students; transformational leadership for Black and Brown boys; identifying gifted students from poverty; and equity-based MTSS.

Going into the third Fellowship cohort, the network of equity-focused leaders around the state is strong and growing, and the organic collaboration between leaders is poised to support all school across North Carolina.

“My participation in the NC ACCESS Visiting Fellows Program afforded me opportunities to learn, grow, and collaborate in a way that is not typical for charter school leaders. Having no district affiliation limits my interaction and engagement with other leaders and this program filled a much-needed void for my professional growth.”

— GeRita Connor, Casa Esperanza Montessori Charter School

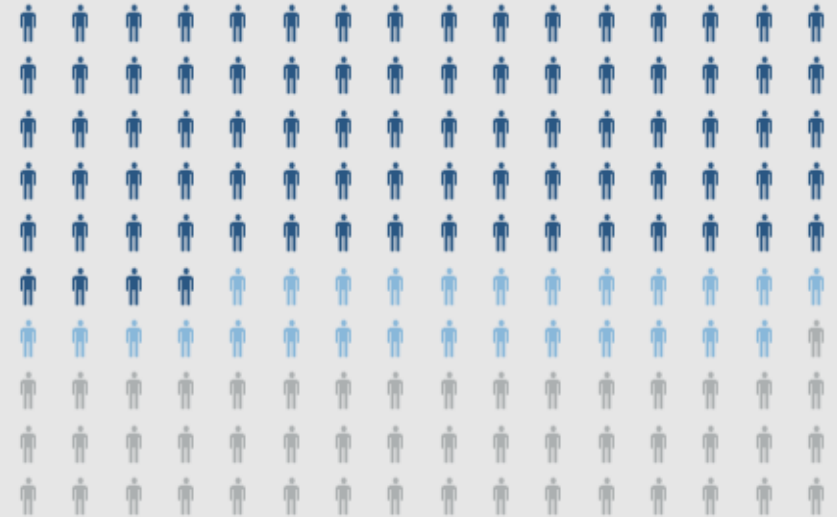
Ultimately, the Fellowship is about preparing leaders to serve educationally disadvantaged students. By focusing on a variety of student subgroups and topics throughout the year, Fellows are provided with research, best practices, advice, and collaborative time with other leaders to develop not only their skills, but their confidence in serving all students.

Through 2 cohorts, 100% of Fellows have indicated that they felt more prepared serving students who are educationally disadvantaged as a result of participating in the Fellowship. This means that we are on track to create a network of 160 leaders who are not only committed to serving educationally disadvantaged students, but also have the experience, skills, and confidence.

The entire charter sector will benefit as these Fellows continue to lead schools dedicated to equity, but also share their wisdom with other leaders. One required component of the Fellowship is presenting at a state or national conference, and while the COVID-19 pandemic has caused many events to be cancelled, some Fellows have already presented and many more will share their knowledge and expertise over the coming years.

A Growing Cohort of Leaders

By year 5, 160 leaders will have completed the ACCESS Fellowship. Through 2 years, 111 leaders have already completed the program, including 84 ACCESS Fellows and 27 Visiting Fellows.



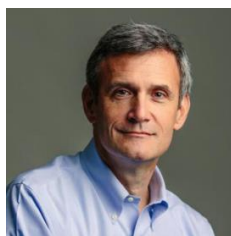
FELLOWSHIP SESSION HIGHLIGHTS



Transformational Leadership for Black and Brown Boys and Men

with Shawn Hardnett, Founder and CEO, Statesmen College Prep

This session focused on identifying and engaging the mindsets and beliefs that are most conducive to transformational work with Black and Brown boys. Participants identified their own existing beliefs to isolate counterproductive beliefs as well as engage productive beliefs that help drive action and impact aligned to the needs of Black and Brown boys in their schools.



How the Other Half Learns: Equality, Excellence, and the Battle Over School Choice

with Robert Pondiscio, Senior Fellow, Fordham Institute

The promise of public education is excellence for all. But that promise has seldom been kept for low-income children of color in America. Journalist Robert Pondiscio focuses on Success Academy and the ways large numbers of engaged and ambitious low-income families of color get an education for their children that equals and even exceeds what wealthy families take for granted.



Understanding Hispanic/Latino Students and Their Parents

with Rubén Perez, Consultant, Aha! Process, Inc.

Hispanic/Latino students have the highest dropout rates and many experience cultural tensions in school when behaviors are misinterpreted as rude or disengaged but are actually a result of cultural upbringing. This workshop provided an understanding of the hidden rules in the Hispanic/Latino culture, discussed issues encountered by Hispanics/Latinos in public schools, and gave strategies to improve academics and socialization.



Leading Equity-Based MTSS for all Students

with Dr. Amy McCart, Research Professor and Co-Director, SWIFT Education Center

MTSS is an array of diverse instructional, behavioral, and social resources delivered as needed based on data for all students. As schools across the state use this model to support students, this interactive session provided a framework for schools to design and implement an equity-based MTSS model which, when implemented with fidelity, is positively correlated with educational equity.

NC ACCESS funds have helped us build a robust, cutting edge high school biotechnology program to attract students in eastern NC who would not otherwise have access to this unique opportunity. We designed this program to help students develop a career path that takes advantage of NC's thriving bio-pharma industry. Our marketing efforts to generate awareness of our biotech curriculum are bearing fruit, as we are seeing a general increase in our high school enrollments and greater interest in the biotech program. We've gone from 54 freshman and sophomores in SY 2020-2021 to 125 ninth through eleventh graders (to date) for the upcoming 2021-2022 school year. The majority of these enrollments are from educationally and economically disadvantaged students. The use of the weighted lottery increased overall ED enrollments in grades K-10 to 65% in SY 2020-2021. The resources from NC ACCESS are helping us further our mission to close the achievement gap and inspire students to become more than they ever thought they could be.

-Sandeep Aggarwal, Sallie B. Howard School

When we step back and take the broader measure of the year, the mission we've sought to advance through this grant underpinned much of our strategic planning, decision-making, and innovating even when it seemed like we were constantly reacting to the newest twist that COVID threw at us. We think that's because building an optimal, accessible, responsive, and replicable learning environment for all children has been our goal from the start. The NC ACCESS Program is allowing us to think creatively about bringing down barriers we know are there for children, and has moved us closer to addressing inequities that have no place in public education

-Joy Warner, Community School of Davidson

ASPIRING MINORITY SCHOOL LEADERS PROGRAM

North Carolina, like most states, faces the challenge of recruiting and retaining effective school leaders. In this age of increased accountability, research has taught us that school leaders are crucial to improving instruction and raising student achievement. Yet even with this changing landscape, one notable characteristic has remained intact: there is a significant lack of school leaders of color. Leadership that represents the cultural and ethnic groups that make up U.S. society is important for all students because the world students will join as adults is richly diverse, and as schools become more culturally and ethnically diverse, there is a need to harness the untapped potential of diverse school leaders.

The Aspiring Minority School Leaders Program is designed to recruit, support, and build a pipeline of school leaders of color prepared to meet the challenges of leading schools for educational equity. North Carolina charter schools will benefit by having access to a cohort of school leaders of color who are exceptionally trained, ready to be part of cutting-edge school reform initiatives, and ready to move into leadership positions with strengthened organizational and instructional leadership skills. The Aspiring Minority School Leaders Program includes coursework, internship experiences, professional development, and mentoring.

The Aspiring Minority School Leaders Program will engage participants through an innovative and collaborative leadership development program that will tap the best and most motivated assistant principals, teacher leaders, and other aspiring school

administrators and provide them with practical and evidence-based training needed to lead North Carolina charter schools towards equitable student achievement. Through the project, North Carolina can not only meet the growing need for school-level charter administrators but will also build a pipeline of highly-qualified, well-prepared candidates of color capable of facing new challenges and inspiring change at the ground level.

The NC ACCESS Program is excited to partner with Appalachian State University to offer the Aspiring Minority School Leaders Program. Candidates will complete the online MSA Add-on Licensure Program at Appalachian State University. The program is a 24-credit hour program and candidates will complete their internship experience at their home-based school, with the school leader serving as the mentor. Upon completion of the Add-on Licensure Program, candidates will earn a North Carolina School Administrator License.

In addition to the Appalachian State University coursework, the program participants are invited to complete the NC ACCESS Fellowship to build supportive and collaborative networks, share best practices, and engage in critical conversations with state and national experts who have experience in leadership best practices and working with educationally disadvantaged student populations.

Learn more and meet the leaders at
www.ncaccessprogram.com/aspiring-minority-leaders-program

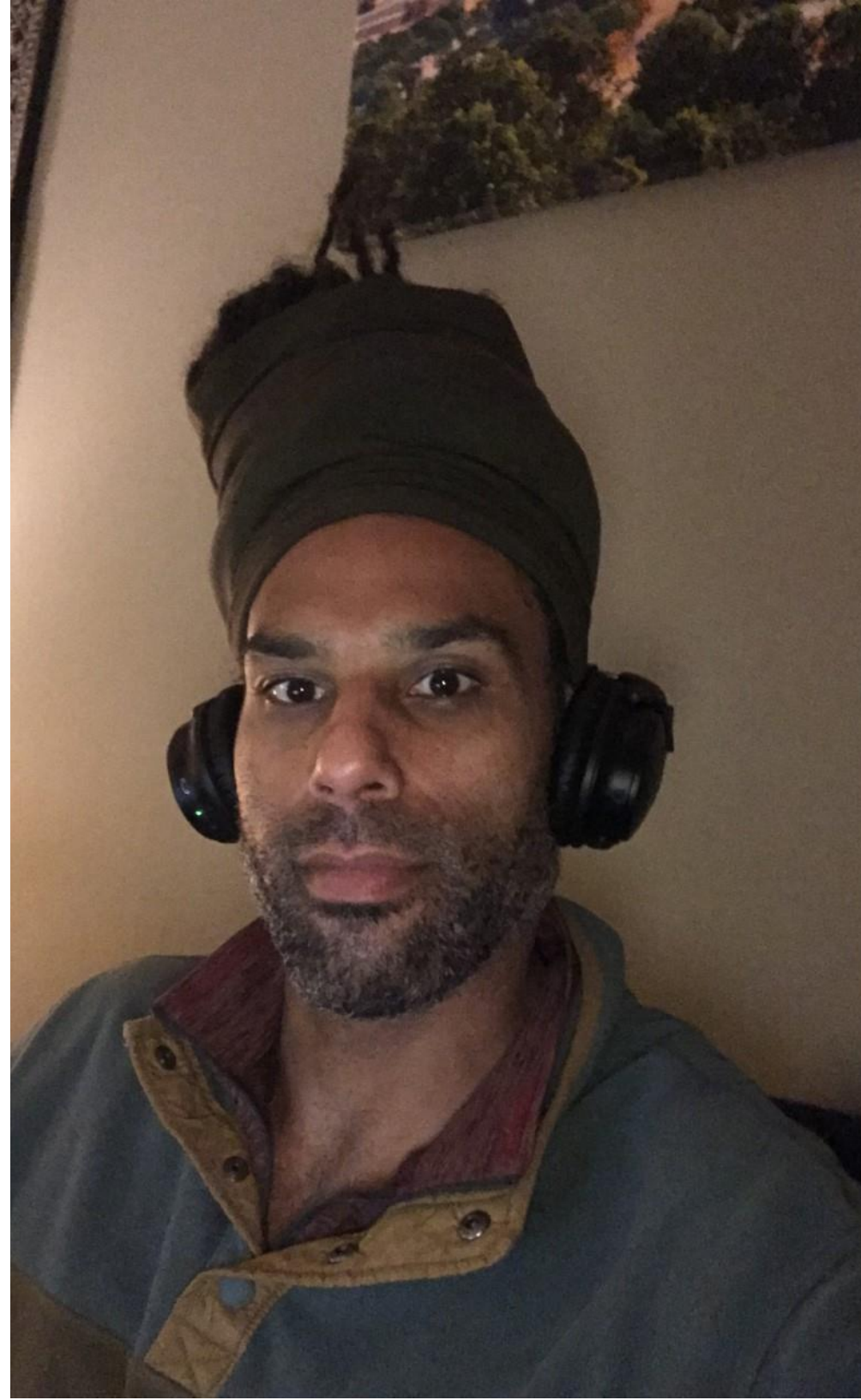
LEADER SPOTLIGHT

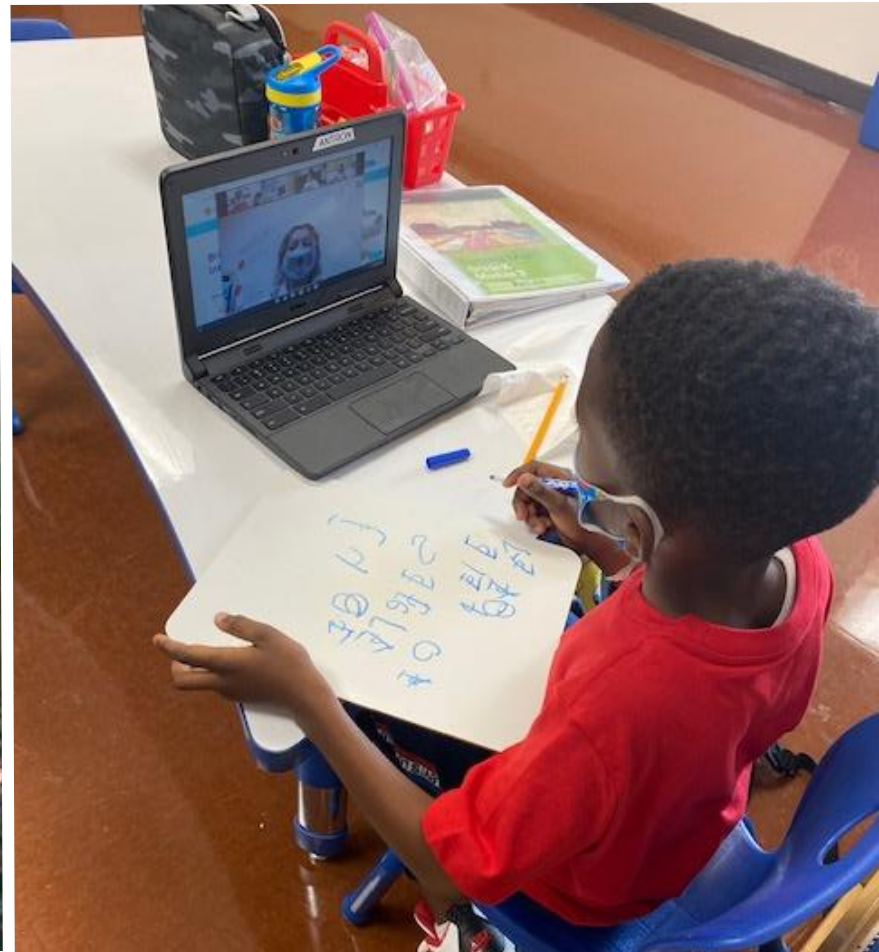
SEAN VERVAIN

I have been a part of the staff leadership team at IC Imagine in Asheville, NC from its inception seven years ago. I developed the Exceptional Children's program, beginning with less than twenty students and growing to nearly two hundred students as the general community has grown to more than 1,200 students.

A critical role in my time at IC Imagine has been to spearhead a committee dedicated to justice in education. I wrote the narrative for the NC ACCESS Grant, which we were awarded in the summer of 2019, and which provides IC Imagine with monetary resources and professional support for the development and implementation of strategic policies and procedures to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students who access public charter schools. Prior to receiving this grant, I coordinated and led a collective of teachers to lay the foundation for an intentionally inclusive and diverse school community through culturally responsive pedagogical practices in all domains of our education programming. Our work is based upon a commitment to dignity and justice for our underserved families and students while continuing to create an engaging and welcoming environment for all.

Innovative schools need dedicated, self-reflective leaders to inspire excellence in all aspects of the learning process, and the Aspiring Minority Leaders Program provides me with the opportunity to continue my work at IC Imagine with new tools, awareness, and professional networking for continuous growth. It is my intention to continue the efforts I started at IC Imagine to become a model for innovative charter schools committed to continuous improvement.





EQUITY-FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In January 2021, the NC ACCESS Program began providing leadership development opportunities for all NC charter schools. Designed to be an investment in the development of charter school leaders, teachers, and staff across NC, these sessions were open to all charter schools, not just NC ACCESS subgrantee schools. All costs for participation were covered by the NC ACCESS Program and the reception was overwhelmingly positive.

In just the first four months of sessions, the NC ACCESS Program provided 24 intensive professional development sessions that included approximately 60 hours of collaborative, virtual learning. These equity-focused sessions not only addressed the immediate needs of virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also spanned a wide range of other topics to help teachers and leaders support educationally disadvantaged and marginalized students. The NC ACCESS Program partnered with both state and national leaders to discuss topics like understanding emotional poverty in

all demographics, trauma and the academic achievement of minority students, social emotional learning in remote settings, creating effective inclusive classrooms, family empowerment and engagement, and more. There were also several sessions focused on supporting students' mental health as they transition back to school after the pandemic. Participants engaged in topics like COVID-19 recovery through the lens of grief and implicit bias, as well as emotional and behavioral challenges that, while more acute as a result of COVID-19, could be applied to many other situations in the future. The takeaways and resources from the sessions will hopefully begin to create more equitable learning environments at charter schools across the state.

Over 300 participants have taken part in the PD offered by the NC ACCESS Program and we are currently working on expanding this amazing resource for the 2021-2022 school year.

20+
sessions

60+
hours

300+
participants

Here's just some of the organizations we've partnered with. Learn more and register at www.ncaccessprogram.com/learn





Name _____

Color the linking-cube pictures

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DISSEMINATION AND COLLABORATION

The third and final overarching goal of the NC ACCESS Program is to disseminate best practices and increase collaboration between charter schools and traditional public schools. While there are a few avenues to disseminate information, the NC ACCESS Program website serves as the central hub for connecting leaders with strategies, resources, and professional development opportunities.

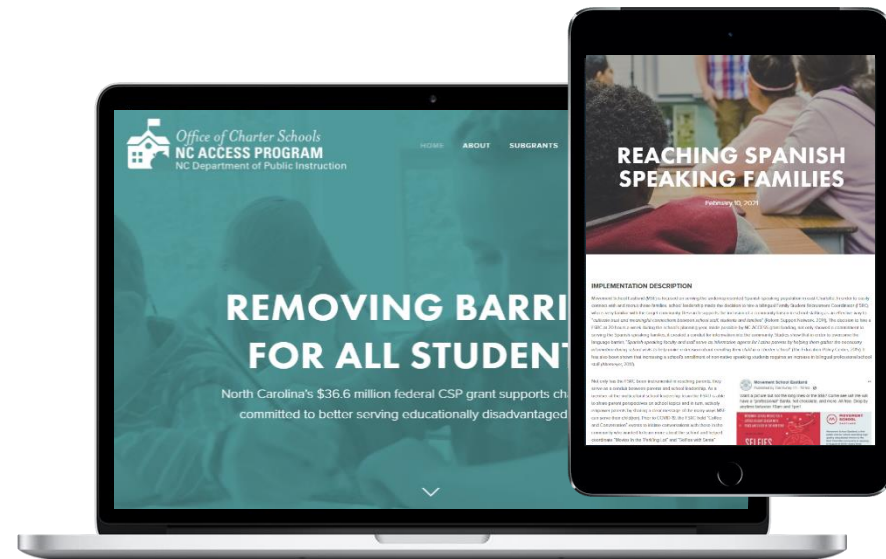
Launched in October 2020, ncaccessprogram.com is designed to be a one-stop shop for all things NC ACCESS. In addition to serving as the central location for all NC ACCESS-related PD and leadership development opportunities, the website also houses the library of best practices that are being developed and implemented by NC ACCESS Fellows.

Each year, ACCESS Fellows leverage the monthly development sessions and lessons learned through the Fellowship to implement best practices for serving educationally disadvantaged students. Together with our partner, ImplementEd, Fellows curate those best practices into easy to use Best Practice Implementation Summaries that can be downloaded and utilized by anyone, anywhere.

Published in Fall 2020, a first set of 11 different Best Practice Implementation Summaries were made public and included strategies for intentional marketing and recruitment, leveraging bilingual community liaisons, developing community advocates, and implementing weighted lotteries. With the second cohort of ACCESS Fellows nearly complete, the library will continue to grow for years to come.

In addition to developing best practices, subgrantees must also host collaborative gatherings with other charter and traditional public schools. The COVID-19 pandemic created a major obstacle to in-person gatherings over the past year; however, some schools were able to begin hosting gatherings, with plans to continue in the future.

Bonnie Cone Classical Academy in Huntersville, NC, hosted two collaboration roundtables focused on strategies for serving educationally disadvantaged students and families, school culture, and professional development. Attendees at those roundtables represented Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools as well as other local area charter schools.



SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CARE

Invest Collegiate–Imagine (IC Imagine) recognized that in order to effectively serve educationally disadvantaged students, they would need to intentionally focus on not just the student, but the entire family and broader school community. Underserved students often have limited access to medical care, and it has been shown that health issues play a significant role in student motivation and student achievement.

Through a partnership with Blue Ridge Health, a community-based health care provider, IC Imagine launched a school-based health center in 2019, which offers accessible primary care to students, families, and staff every day. In fact, 56% of students and 55% of staff have selected the on-campus health center as their primary care provider.

School-based healthcare eliminates many of the barriers to care such as cost, transportation, and trust. The center provides a full-time nurse and both a Physician’s Assistant and mental health provider three days a week. Not only does this model bolster the daily services afforded to students who become sick at school, it also offers families the ability to make primary care appointments, receive physical exams and immunizations, have prescriptions issued, and receive mental health supports.

With a school-based model in place, families no longer need to take as much time off from work and students can spend more time in the classroom learning.

NC ACCESS
BEST PRACTICES

School Culture
Removing Barriers

Families First – School Based Healthcare

Implementation Description

Invest Collegiate Imagine (IC Imagine) is a school focused on increasing their educationally disadvantaged (ED) student population and implementing strategies that will ensure their academic growth. The school’s leadership team recognized that in order to effectively serve ED students, they would need to intentionally focus on not just the student, but the entire family and broader school community, which has resulted in the implementation of a number of family support services. The first strategy to be fully implemented was a school-based health center. Underserved students often have limited access to medical care and it has been shown that health issues play a significant role in student motivation and student achievement.¹ School-based healthcare eliminates many of the barriers to care such as cost, transportation, and trust.² With a school-based model in place, families no longer need to take as much time off from work and students can spend more time in the classroom learning.³ Recognizing the benefit of a school-based healthcare model and knowing that Blue Ridge Health, a community-based provider, was interested in establishing school-based health centers, IC Imagine reached out to learn more and the school’s leadership team moved to implement the model. Through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), Blue Ridge Health Center opened in the school building in the fall of 2019.

Blue Ridge Health runs the school-based health center in a way similar to a doctor’s office, offering accessible primary care to students, families, and staff every day. The center provides a full-time nurse, a Physician’s Assistant (PA) three days a week, and a mental health provider three days a week. Families are able to make primary care well appointments and can receive immunizations at this location. When a child is not feeling

June 18, 2020

About This School

IC Imagine

At IC Imagine we are dedicated to ensuring that all students are learning at high levels through an integrated approach to the whole child by: Valuing every member of our school community; Engaging all students in Core Curriculum, Spanish, Fine Arts, and Active Living; and Encouraging students to become Leaders. We strive to support students, families, and learning processes to move beyond embracing diversity towards actions that implement culturally responsive pedagogy within curriculum, field trips, cultural performances, service-learning projects, classroom activities, discipline policy, and community communication. Our educational policy recognizes the multitude of human expressions in localities, the United States, and the world as we prepare children to live and thrive in an interconnected and interdependent 21st century global society.

Year School Opened: 2014-15
Grant Awarded: 2019-20
Grade Levels Served: K-12

2019-20 Student Demographics



Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
White	81%
Hispanic	9%
Asian	1%
Black	2%
Other	7%

% ED Student Population: 29%
Urbanicity: Rural / Asheville, NC
Persons in Poverty (Buncombe)*: 11.5%

Ongoing Support

IC Imagine has a full-time nurse and a Physician’s Assistant (PA) on campus. The center is staffed with a mental health provider.

Equity Connections

- Student health outcomes have improved significantly regarding
- Guardianship cases have decreased significantly since 2015, likely due to increased living in the community. The prevalence of disadvantage has decreased significantly, and academic achievement has increased.

Research

1. Basch, C. (2015). *How to improve student achievement*. 1561.20
2. Ben-Ishai, D. (2015). *Retrieval practice*. 1561.20
3. Love, H. (2015). *Years of research*. <https://www.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED584841.pdf>
4. Rothstein, J. (2015). *Causes of school failure*. <https://www.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED584841.pdf>
5. School-based healthcare: <http://www.naspe.org/2015/04/2015-04-20-school-based-healthcare/>
6. Strolin-Goltzman J, Sisselman A, Melekis K, Auerbach C. *Understanding the relationship between school-based health center use, school connection, and academic performance*. *Health Soc Work*. 2014;39(2):83–91.
7. United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts North Carolina, Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/facts/table/NC/IPST045219>

June 18, 2020

EXPLORE MORE OF THE NC ACCESS PROGRAM

Learn about the subgrantees, search best practices,
find professional development, and more
at ncaccessprogram.com.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The NC ACCESS Program’s expenditures are broken down into three categories: administrative, technical assistance, and subgrants. In accordance with federal Charter School Program regulations, total expenditures in each category must adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Not less than 90% of the grant funds will be used to award subgrants;
2. Not less than 7% of the grant funds will be used to provide technical assistance; and
3. Not more than 3% of the grant funds will be used for administrative costs.

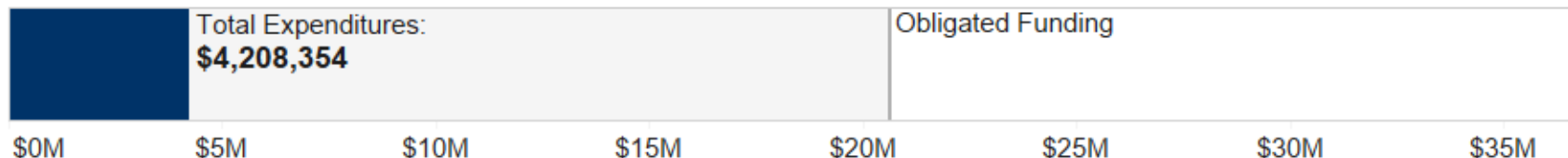
Through June 1, 2021 the Program has expended \$4,208,354 of the total CSP grant through direct payments and subgrantee reimbursements. \$3,783,723 (90%) has been expended in reimbursements to subgrantees; \$370,863 (9%) for technical assistance costs; and \$53,768 (1%) for administrative costs. The total obligations of the grant as of June 1, 2021 were \$20,651,211, which includes awarded subgrant funding that has not yet been expended and reimbursed.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the overall implementation and budget of the program. All events, including monitoring, technical assistance, and Fellowship sessions were conducted virtually for the entire year. This has resulted in overall expenditures being lower than anticipated. Specifically, travel costs were not incurred during the 2020-2021 school year, nor was additional funding set-aside to support other Office of Charter Schools conferences and development.

Similarly, subgrantee expenditures were lower than anticipated during the previous school year. Not only were school leaders focused on the specific logistical challenges of adapting to remote instruction, many NC ACCESS Program priorities (transportation, lunch, marketing, and recruitment, etc.) are dependent on in-person activities. It is expected that a significant increase in subgrantee expenditures will begin during the 2021-2022 school year. However, Cohort 1 subgrantees did utilize \$302,990 in additional COVID stimulus funds to help transition to virtual learning.

CSP Grant Expenditures Progress

'Total Expenditures' represent all payments and reimbursements made as of June 1, 2021. 'Obligated Funding' represents additional funding awarded to subgrantees that has not yet been reimbursed.



Even as the impacts of COVID dominated the previous year, subgrantees continue to make progress towards the goals and objectives of the program.

Through two application cycles, the NC ACCESS Program has awarded over \$20.2 million to 42 schools, and their expenses are showcasing their priorities. Subgrantees have made an intentional investment in the physical resources most needed for students. Technology and Equipment is by far the most widely utilized category of expenses. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, subgrantees were investing in instructional devices for students, with many schools moving to a 1:1 technology ratio. 33% of all subgrant expenditures to date have gone toward instructional technology and equipment.

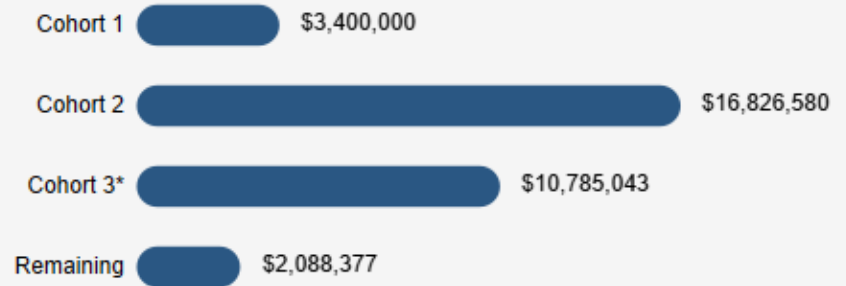
Similarly, instructional supplies and materials, which include classroom resources like books and curriculum materials, accounted for 22% of all subgrant expenditures.

The third highest investment area for subgrantees is Professional Fees and Contracted Services. Accounting for 20% of all expenditures, these services often include contracted health services, professional development for teachers, transportation services, and marketing and recruitment services.

Finally, while salaries can only be paid in a planning year before a school opens, multiple subgrantees have leveraged NC ACCESS funds to bring on a school leader early to lay the groundwork for a successful school opening.

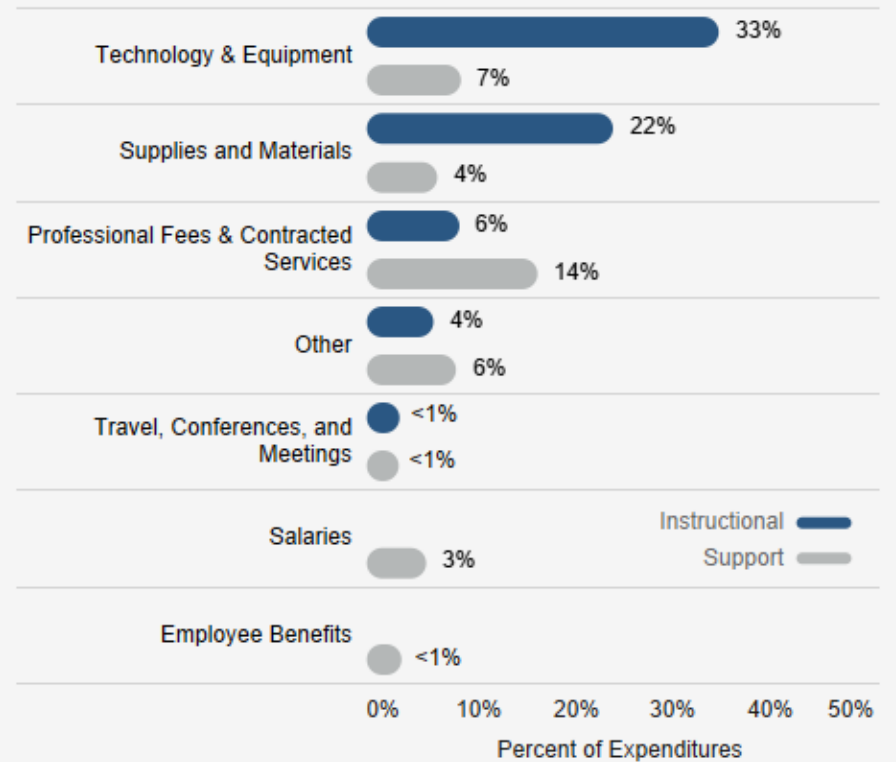
How much money has been awarded?

\$20.2m have been awarded to schools through 2 cycles. The 3rd cycle is projected* to award \$10.8m, leaving \$2.1m remaining.



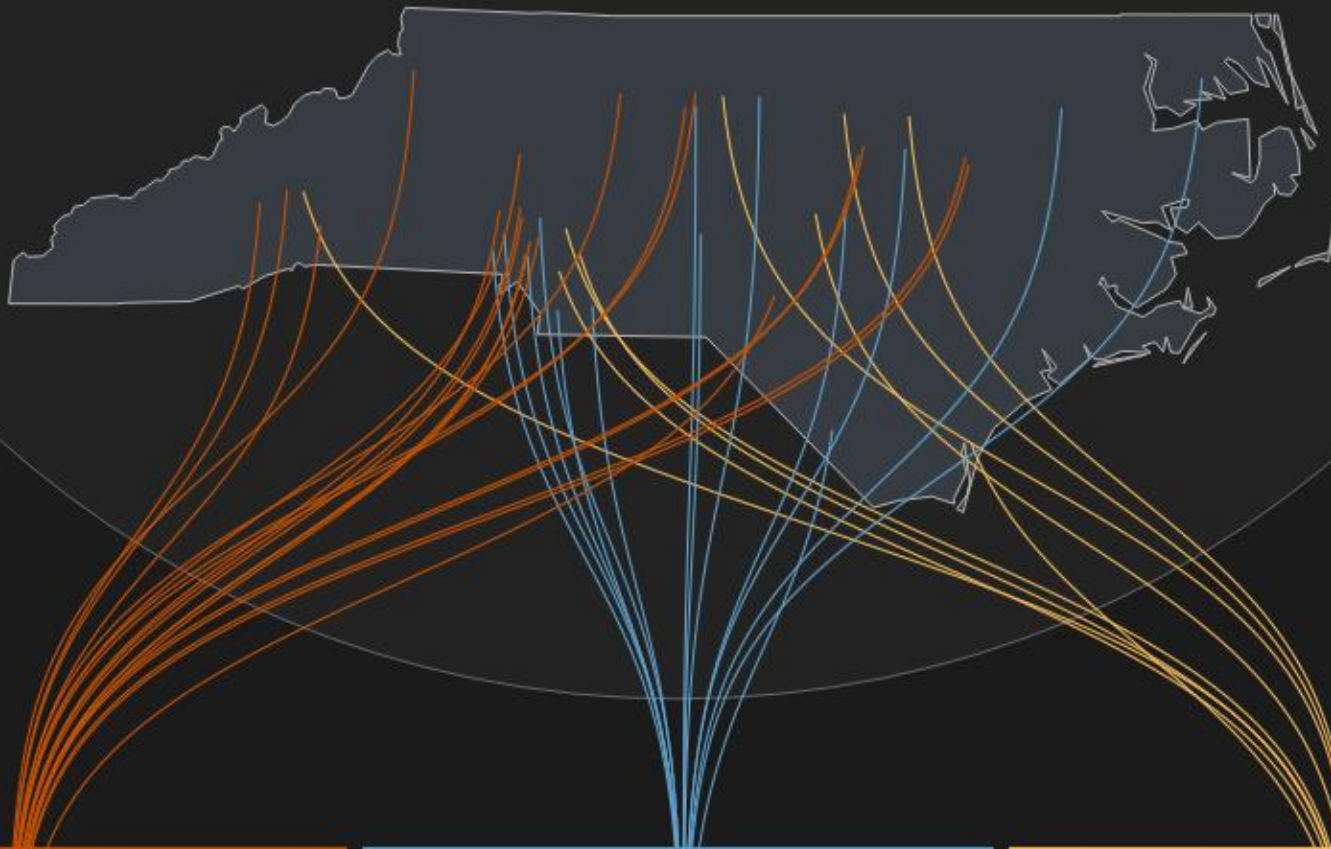
How are subgrantees spending their money?

Expenditures are categorized as 'instructional' or 'support' costs. As of June 1, 2021, 65% of all expenditures were 'instructional'.



OUR REACH

Each year, the NC ACCESS Program grows to support more schools and students across the state. Through two years, the Program has expanded its reach to 42 schools serving over 20,000 students across 22 counties.



Schools



Counties



Students



Schools



Counties



Students



Schools



Counties



Students

WHAT COMES NEXT

The NC ACCESS Program is the start of a long journey towards greater equity in the NC charter school sector. With three year's remaining in the state's grant period, there are a few specific areas we're focusing on.

First, the third subgrant application cycle will conclude in July 2021 and most subgrant funding will have been awarded. One additional cycle in 2022 will complete the subgrant awards. That means, as we move deeper into the implementation of subgrants, the Program's support and monitoring will become even more crucial. Holding schools accountable to their enrollment goals and project objectives will come through robust monitoring, but also through support and technical assistance, as we recognize that schools are tackling ambitious and difficult plans.

Second, as the number of subgrantees grows, so does the cohort of leaders that complete the ACCESS Fellowship. With the return of conferences and other in-person events, as well as utilizing virtual tools that became commonplace during the pandemic, we must leverage the expertise of these leaders.

Sharing best practices, presenting at conferences, and hosting their own collaborative events will help support the entire charter sector. By creating collaborative networks, mentoring

relationships, and other channels for greater communication, all leaders can engage and problem solve together so no one is on an island.

As one Fellow said, "I think the networking has been great...I think that one of the strengths of the program [is] to give you a cohort of leaders that you can talk to and understand that your problems are not always unique, maybe they have a unique solution, but there's a lot of commonality."

Finally, we know that recruiting and enrolling educationally disadvantaged students is just the first step. Removing barriers to access can get kids in the door, but we also must ensure that they can access the curriculum and are served in equitable educational environments. Most subgrantees have invested in teacher development, curriculum materials, and instructional technologies to support all students. As state testing returns, a critical marker will be whether the investments subgrantees have made in their educational programs are benefiting the academic achievement and growth of disadvantaged students.

We're proud of the progress we've made in 2 years, but we know there is still a long and exciting journey ahead.

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