



Office of Charter Schools

NC ACCESS PROGRAM

NC Department of Public Instruction

2022 Annual Review



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2022 Annual Review at:
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\$36.6 MILLION.

60 EXCELLENT SCHOOLS.

160 TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS.

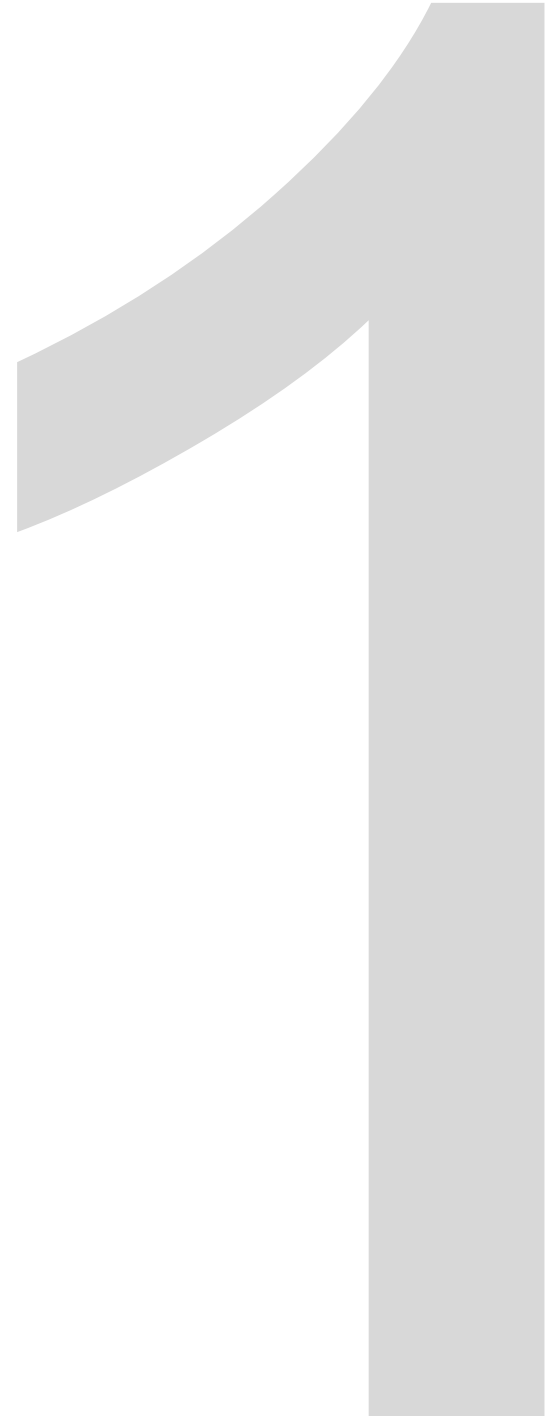
A Message from the NC ACCESS Team

Last year was hard. We've talked to dozens of school leaders over the past year, and many told us some version of the same story: this past school year was the hardest yet. After the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools in early 2020, many expected a return to some version of normalcy for the 2021 school year. That didn't happen. The pandemic still came in waves; quarantines interrupted any rhythm to the year; and global supply-chain issues strained even the most basic operational functions. But even those immense challenges paled in comparison to the academic and social emotional needs of students transitioning back into classrooms. The full impact of the pandemic is still coming into focus, but the reality is clear: students and teachers sacrificed a lot. The impact on learning was significant. The impact on mental health was significant. The trauma touched us all. But through it all our subgrantees met the moment.

They navigated once-in-a-lifetime operational, academic, financial, and public health challenges, and still managed to serve more educationally disadvantaged students, provide expanded services and supports, and outpace the state in many academic outcomes. We could not be more grateful for their leadership, or indebted to their service, through such a turbulent time.

This report details the successes and challenges of the last year. You will see how our schools and leaders are working to create equitable learning environments for each student they serve and increasing access for students they don't yet serve.

Year in Review



Since 2018, the North Carolina Office of Charter Schools has been implementing the NC ACCESS Program through a \$36.6 million federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant to achieve 3 major priorities:

1. Award 60 school-level subgrants to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students attending high-quality charter schools;
2. Create a cohort of 160 charter school leaders who can develop and demonstrate best practices in serving educationally disadvantaged students; and
3. Broadly disseminate best practices for serving educationally disadvantaged students and foster collaboration in the charter school community and between charter schools and traditional public schools.

At the close of the 2020-2021 school year, the NC ACCESS Program was halfway through its 5-year CSP grant implementation. Forty charter schools were implementing subgrants to serve more educationally disadvantaged students; over 100 leaders had completed the intensive, yearlong ACCESS Fellowship; and the Program had provided over 60 hours of free professional development to all charter schools across the state.



Moving into the 2021-22 school year, the NC ACCESS Program built on that foundation to expand the subgrant program, develop more equity-focused leaders, and support schools with learning opportunities and best practices to serve all students.

We are excited to share a few highlights from the past year as a snapshot of NC ACCESS as it continues to implement with fidelity and progress toward its overall goals.

The remainder of this report will provide additional details about the program's implementation, progress, and impact.



JULY 2021

19 charter schools are awarded subgrants totaling \$10.8m during the third competitive application cycle.

AUGUST 2021

51 subgrantees begin the 2021-22 school year serving nearly 30,000 students. 8 additional subgrantees in the planning period continue preparing to launch their schools in future years.

SEPTEMBER 2021

Cohort 3 of the ACCESS Fellowship begins with 46 Fellows, including 4 traditional public school principals using the state's Restart Model.

DECEMBER 2021

2 newly approved charter schools are awarded replication subgrants totaling \$2.4m during the fourth competitive application cycle.

MAY 2022

The NC ACCESS Program completes its annual monitoring review schedule, which included full programmatic and fiscal reviews of 37 subgrantees.

JUNE 2022

12 aspiring leaders of color complete the Aspiring Minority School Leaders Program and obtain their MSA Add-on License from Appalachian State University.

JULY 2022

The Transformative Executive Leadership Program launches to support 30 charter school principals across the state.

Subgrant Program



The subgrant program is the largest investment the NC ACCESS Program makes to remove barriers for educationally disadvantaged students. Over 90% of our total CSP award goes directly to schools through a competitive subgrant application process. Through four cycles, the NC ACCESS Program has awarded 62 charter schools with subgrants totaling \$33 million.

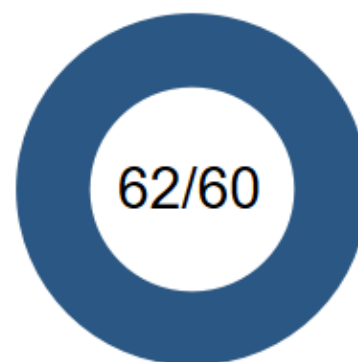
These awards, averaging about \$530,000, are supporting charter schools of all size, age, and location to ensure they are removing barriers to access for educationally disadvantaged students. So far, 33 new schools have been supported in their planning year or first few years of operation; 26 high-quality schools have worked to expand their enrollment of educationally disadvantaged students; and 3 schools were awarded to replicate existing high-quality school models.

Each subgrantee spends 5 years in the NC ACCESS Program, receiving funding and technical assistance to support their implementation of goals and strategies to serve more educationally disadvantaged students. Our first cohort of 9 schools has just completed their third year in the program, with cohorts 2 and 3 completing their second and first years, respectively. In addition to the ACCESS Fellowship and professional development described in Part 4, the Program also plans and provides specific technical assistance like webinars, guidance documents, and other supports for targeted grant requirements like weighted lottery implementation, transportation, lunch support, and more.

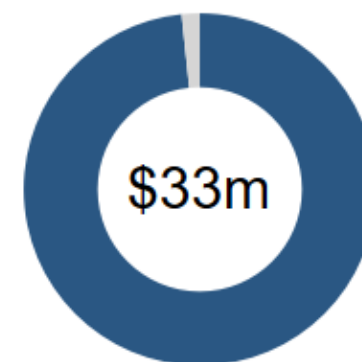
Subgrant Program Progress

Through June 30, 2022, the NC ACCESS Program has surpassed its goal of awarding 60 subgrants. Remaining funds allocated for subgrants will be awarded during the 2022-23 school year.

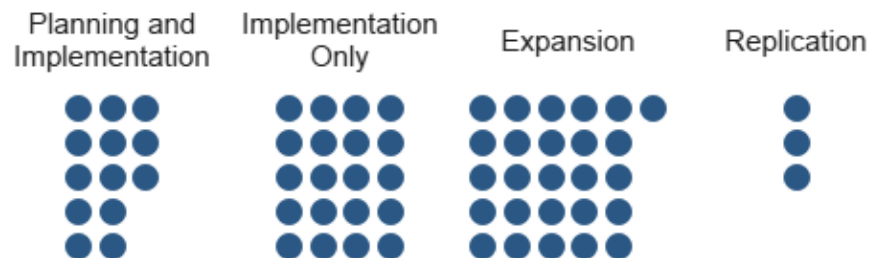
Subgrants Awarded



Funding Awarded

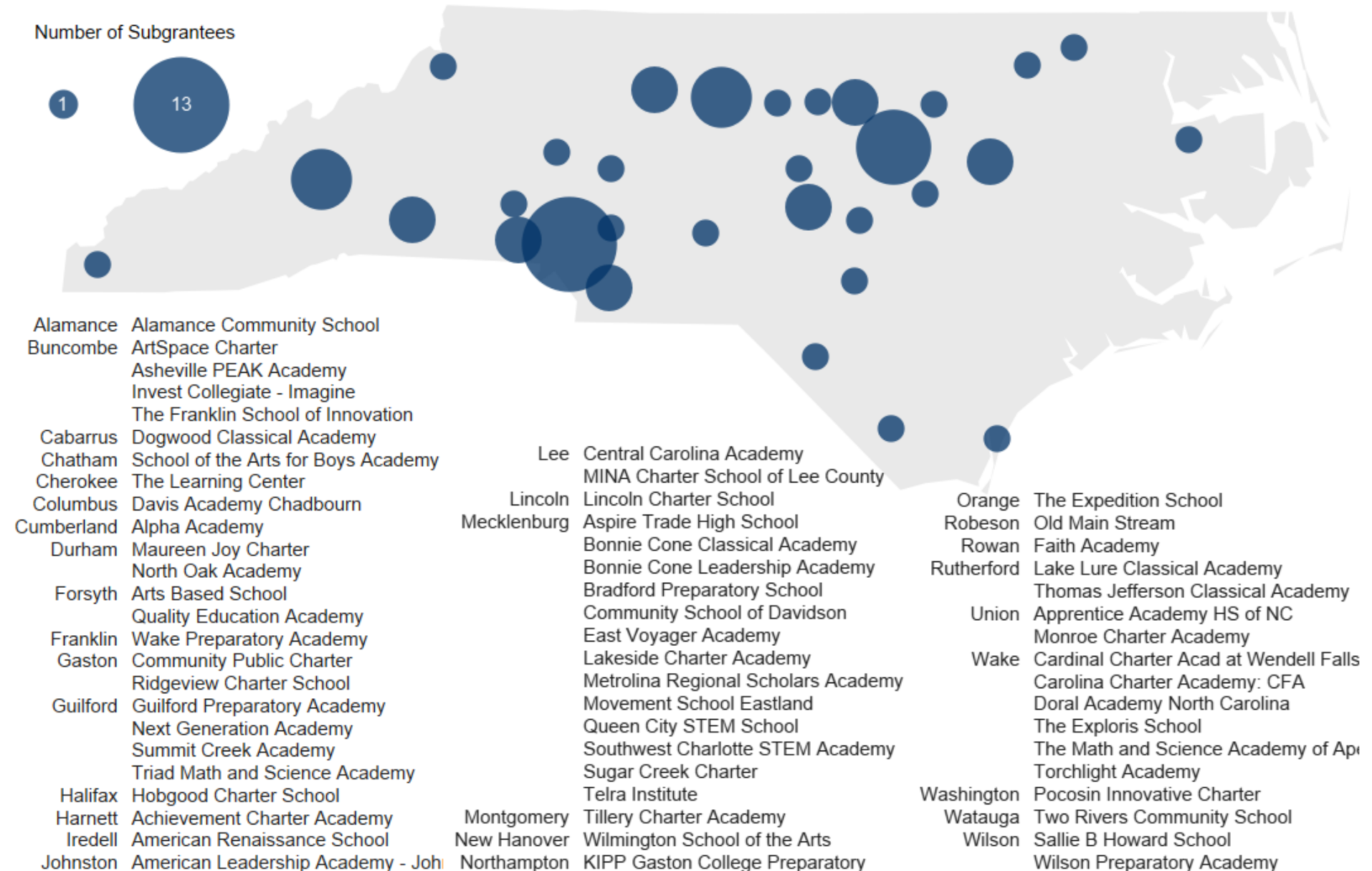


Subgrantees Awarded in Each Category



Creating a Statewide Network

NC ACCESS Program subgrantees span the state of NC. During the 2021-2022 school year, 62 subgrantee schools have been awarded across 31 counties. Through the ACCESS Fellowship and other professional opportunities, these subgrantees have begun to create a collaborative network of leaders and schools committed to serving more educationally disadvantaged students.



*West Triangle High School, a recently approved replication, is not pictured.



Along with technical assistance and support, the NC ACCESS Program conducts programmatic and fiscal monitoring of all subgrantees to ensure that schools are on track toward meeting the goals of the Program and that all funds are used on allowable costs. The NC ACCESS Program completed 37 full programmatic and fiscal monitoring reviews during the 2021-22 school year.

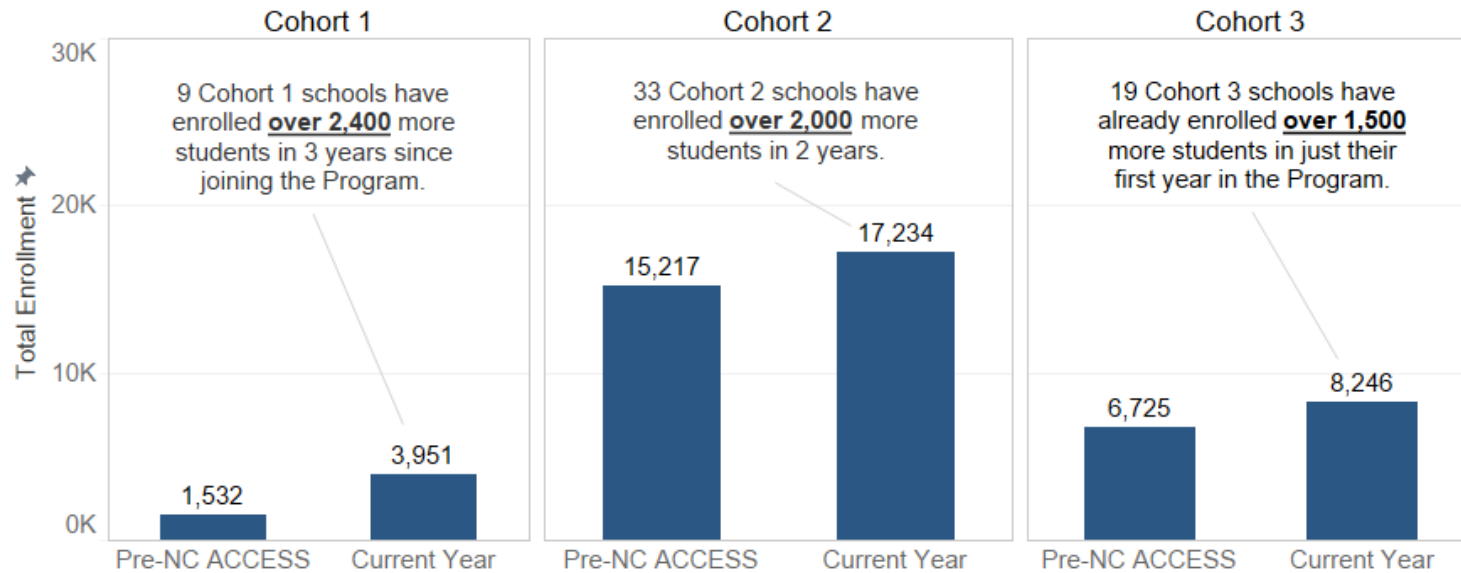
As a result of the high standards and accountability expected by the Program and the Office of Charter Schools, three schools have had their awards terminated and funding returned.

Ultimately, NC ACCESS subgrants are designed to support our high-quality schools' ability to increase access and serve more students. The funding, technical assistance, and networking is providing schools the resources and support they need to grow and thrive. Through 3 years, the program has supported 62 schools, 51 of which are operational and serving nearly 30,000 students. Some subgrantees are new schools that are continuing to grow and build a sustained neighborhood presence; while others are long-standing bedrocks of the community that are seizing the opportunity to add more seats and serve more students.

Even with the challenges presented over the past 2 years by the COVID-19 pandemic, subgrantees worked diligently to increase access to their schools and enrolled nearly 6,000 more students than before joining the NC ACCESS Program.

NC ACCESS Program Schools Grow to Serve More Students

All subgrantees projected 5-year enrollment growth to serve a greater population of students. Since the Program first awarded subgrants three years ago, nearly 6,000 additional students are now attending high-quality charter schools across the state.



As subgrantees grow and expand over the course of their award periods, the NC ACCESS Program closely monitors each school’s progress toward meeting their enrollment targets. For those subgrantees that were open, 16% met their overall annual enrollment projections, and 35% were within a 10% margin of meeting overall enrollment goals. Thirty-one percent of open schools met or exceeded their enrollment projections for educationally disadvantaged students, with another 31% within a 10% window of meeting their educationally disadvantaged student enrollment goal as well. The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the key factors that impacted marketing to families, and while the Program has not met its annual performance goal of 75% of schools meeting their target enrollment numbers, we continue to monitor subgrantees’ progress toward enrollment goals and expect it to rebound in the coming years.

While overall enrollment growth is important to ensure our best schools are serving more students, schools are also focusing those growth efforts on student subgroups that will increase the populations of underserved populations. The NC ACCESS Program’s primary objectives center on diversity through the increased enrollment of educationally disadvantaged students, which is discussed in more detail in Part 3. The Program does not have specific racial diversity goals since weighted lotteries cannot account for race. However, while educational disadvantages are not limited to any race, the data is proof that we cannot ignore the connections and correlations. The broader effort to diversify the North Carolina charter sector is being accelerated by subgrantees in the NC ACCESS Program.

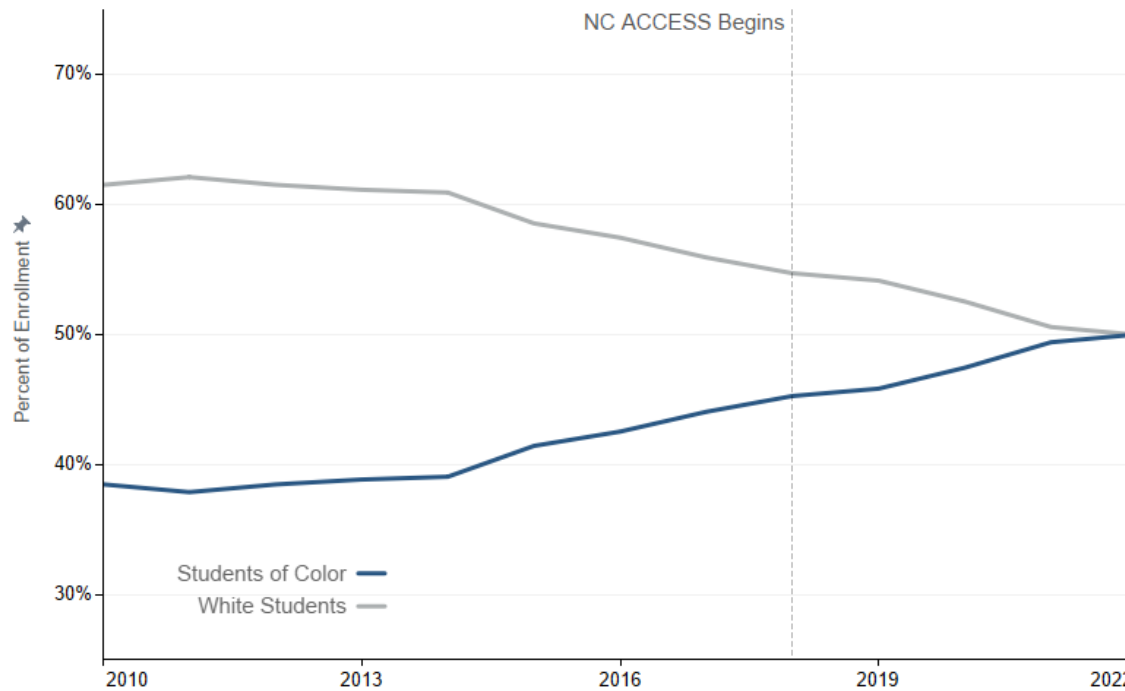


The Diversifying Charter Sector

According to enrollment data from the Department of Public Instruction, for the first time since they opened, North Carolina charter schools serve an equal number of students of color and white students. The racial diversity of the charter school population has steadily increased over the past decade and has accelerated since the NC ACCESS Program began in 2018. NC ACCESS subgrantees have increased their enrollment of students of color by over 53% since the Program began, compared to an increase of 20% for non-subgrantees over the same 4-year period.

The Diversifying Charter Sector

North Carolina charter schools now serve an equal number of students of color and white students. While the charter sector has steadily become more diverse over the past decade, the trend has accelerated in the past few years and non-white students now make up half of the NC charter school student population.



Charter schools throughout North Carolina are working to ensure they are taking steps to mirror the demographics of the communities they serve. While the progress is promising, we recognize there is still work to do, and NC ACCESS subgrantees can continue to lead the way.

As the demand for high-quality public charter schools continues across the state, the sector continues to grow and diversify. In the last decade, an additional 36,000 white students have enrolled in charter schools in NC. In comparison, an additional 46,000 students of color have enrolled, including significant increases of over 500% for Hispanic students, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students, and students who identify as Two or More Races. Since the charter school cap was lifted in 2011, charter schools have enrolled over 13,000 more Hispanic students, a 526% increase.

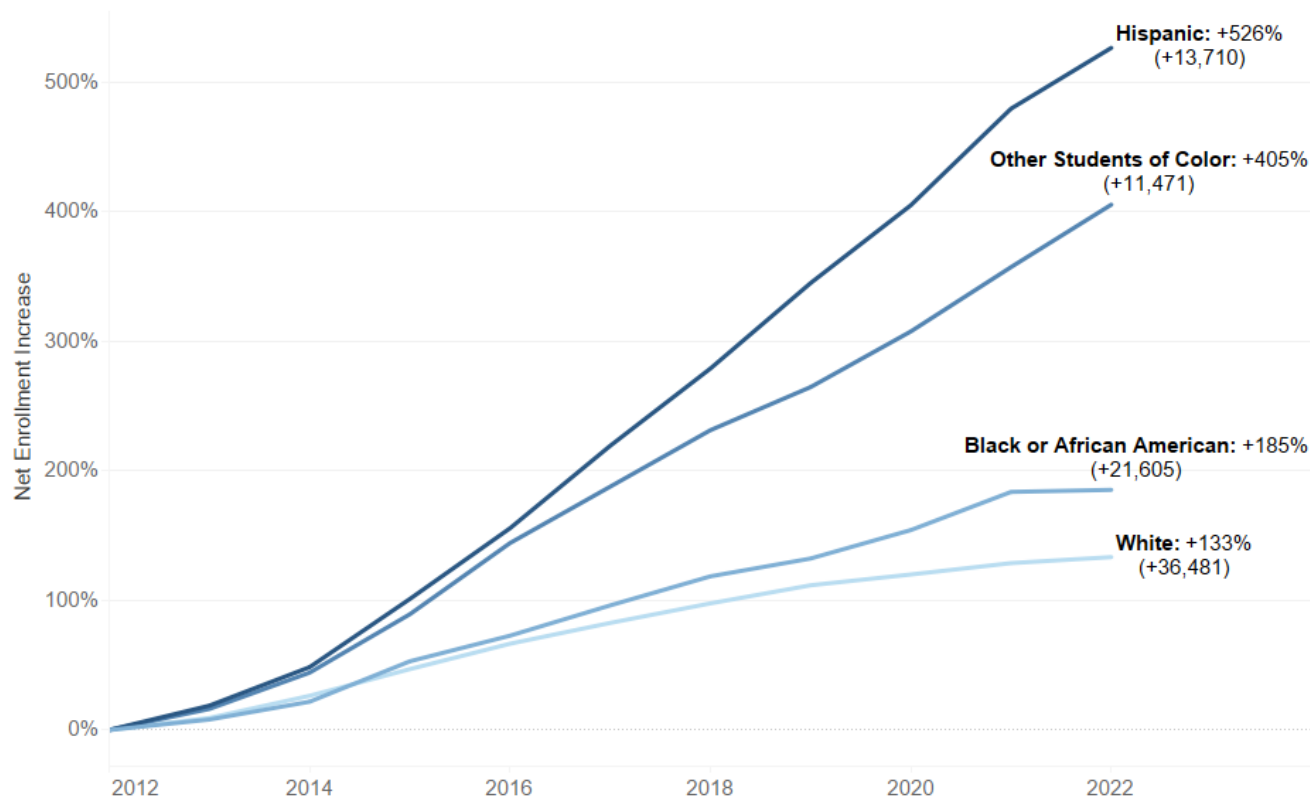
NC ACCESS Program subgrantees are recognizing the need to adapt their marketing and recruitment practices to ensure they are removing barriers for Hispanic families and particularly those that speak languages other than English. In addition to the common practice of translating marketing

materials and official school documents into the primary languages spoken by families in the community, several subgrantees have invested in bilingual community liaisons to ensure they are building authentic relationships with the communities they wish to serve.

From the beginning, the NC ACCESS Program set out to support as many schools as possible that were committed to removing barriers. In just 3 years, the Program has exceeded the total number of subgrants it planned to award. Now these schools, with more on the way, are implementing proven strategies to remove barriers so all students have access to a high-quality public school choice option.

NC Charter Schools Expand Enrollment of Students of Color

In the last decade, an additional 36,000 white students have enrolled in charter schools in NC. In comparison, an additional 46,000 students of color have enrolled, including a 526% increase in Hispanic student enrollment totaling over 13,000 students.





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SPOTLIGHT

Academic Progress and Closing Proficiency Gaps

COVID-19 created significant challenges for the administration and validity of state assessments over the past 2 years. However, a Friday Institute evaluation of student achievement data for the 2021-22 school year shows that NC ACCESS subgrantees are having a positive impact and closing proficiency gaps across many student subgroups. Results indicate that on average, 37% of students attending NC ACCESS schools met proficiency standards in Mathematics and 49% in Language Arts.

Digging deeper into specific subgroups, the Friday Institute found that for economically disadvantaged students, 22% on average met proficiency standards in Mathematics; and 37% met proficiency standards in Language Arts. Also, according to the Friday Institute analysis, English learners had both Math and Language Arts proficiency rates of 21%, and students with disabilities were 17% proficient in Math and 20% proficient in Language Arts. Additionally, they examined student populations that are not included within the educationally disadvantaged definition but continue to be marginalized. On average 37% of Hispanic students met proficiency standards in Math and 46% were proficient in Language Arts, while 22% of Black students met proficiency standards in Math and 35% in Language Arts.

2020-21 Average Academic Proficiency Results in Math and Language Arts

	Math (NC ACCESS)	Math (State)	+/-	Language Arts (NC ACCESS)	Language Arts (State)	+/-
All Students	37%	40%	-3%	49%	46%	+3%
Black	22%	19%	+3%	35%	29%	+6%
Hispanic	37%	29%	+8%	46%	33%	+13%
Students with Disabilities	17%	13%	+4%	20%	14%	+6%
English Learners	21%	16%	+5%	21%	12%	+9%
Economically Disadvantaged	22%	23%	-1%	37%	29%	+8%

To determine what effect NC ACCESS subgrantees might be having on closing academic proficiency gaps, the Friday Institute compared NC ACCESS schools to state averages by subject and sub-category for all schools across the state. What they found was that on average subgrantees are outperforming the state in most subgroup categories. When looking at overall results, students in NC ACCESS schools scored slightly lower on average in Math (-2%) and 4% higher in Language Arts. Economically disadvantaged students also had slightly lower average math proficiency rates than the state (-1%) but scored statistically significantly higher in Language Arts (+9%). Students with disabilities (+6%) and English language learners (+10%) also scored statistically significantly higher in Language Arts. When looking at racial subgroups, they found that Hispanic students scored statistically significantly higher than NC in both Math (+8%) and Language Arts (+14%). This subgroup also had the highest percentage difference compared to the state average when looking across subcategories. Black students also met Language Arts proficiency standards at a statistically significantly higher level (+6%).

Removing Barriers for All Students



The overarching priority of the NC ACCESS Program is to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students served in North Carolina charter schools. Historically, more affluent families have had an advantage of moving into desirable school zones, affording private school education, or driving their students to schools that are farther away. We know that school choice options, and specifically free public charter schools, allow all families to seek out and find the right educational environment for their students. However, certain barriers to enrollment still remain, particularly for educationally disadvantaged students.

To address and remove these barriers, NC ACCESS subgrantees are required to implement certain priorities that disproportionately impact educationally disadvantaged students, especially those experiencing poverty. Through our partnership with the Friday Institute at NC State University, and the NC ACCESS Program's routine monitoring of subgrantees, we can see the development and implementation of these critical student services across the state. The Friday Institute team reviewed the submitted marketing, transportation, school lunch, weighted lottery, professional development, and school discipline and climate plans along with school leaders' survey answers to assess comprehensiveness in addressing the needs of educationally disadvantaged students.

Most prominently, subgrantees are required to provide a plan for daily transportation and school nutrition to ensure those services are provided for each student that may need them. To-date, 52% of subgrantees have fully implemented their proposed transportation plan and 63% of subgrantees have fully implemented their school lunch plan. Several schools discussed difficulties implementing these particular program plans due to COVID-19, staffing issues, and resource shortages. The NC ACCESS Program continues to support and provide technical assistance to ensure services are fully implemented within each subgrantee's 5-year award period.

A third requirement for subgrantees is that they implement a weighted admissions lottery. Charter schools are public schools, and therefore hold random admissions lotteries to enroll students if the number of students who apply exceeds the number of seats available. To ensure subgrantees have a way of prioritizing the enrollment of educationally disadvantaged students, subgrantees are required to implement a weighted lottery. However, it is not just subgrantees implementing this best practice. While still a fairly new practice nationally, the use of weighted lotteries has expanded greatly across North Carolina.



SPOTLIGHT

The Weighted Lottery

North Carolina law allows charter schools to conduct weighted lotteries that are consistent with the school’s mission and approved by the State Board of Education. Weighted lotteries allow schools to give preference to certain subgroups of students to increase their likelihood of being selected in an admissions lottery. Federal guidelines outline categories of “educational disadvantage” that can be given a statistically higher chance of admission during a lottery, including students experiencing poverty, students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, and migrant students.

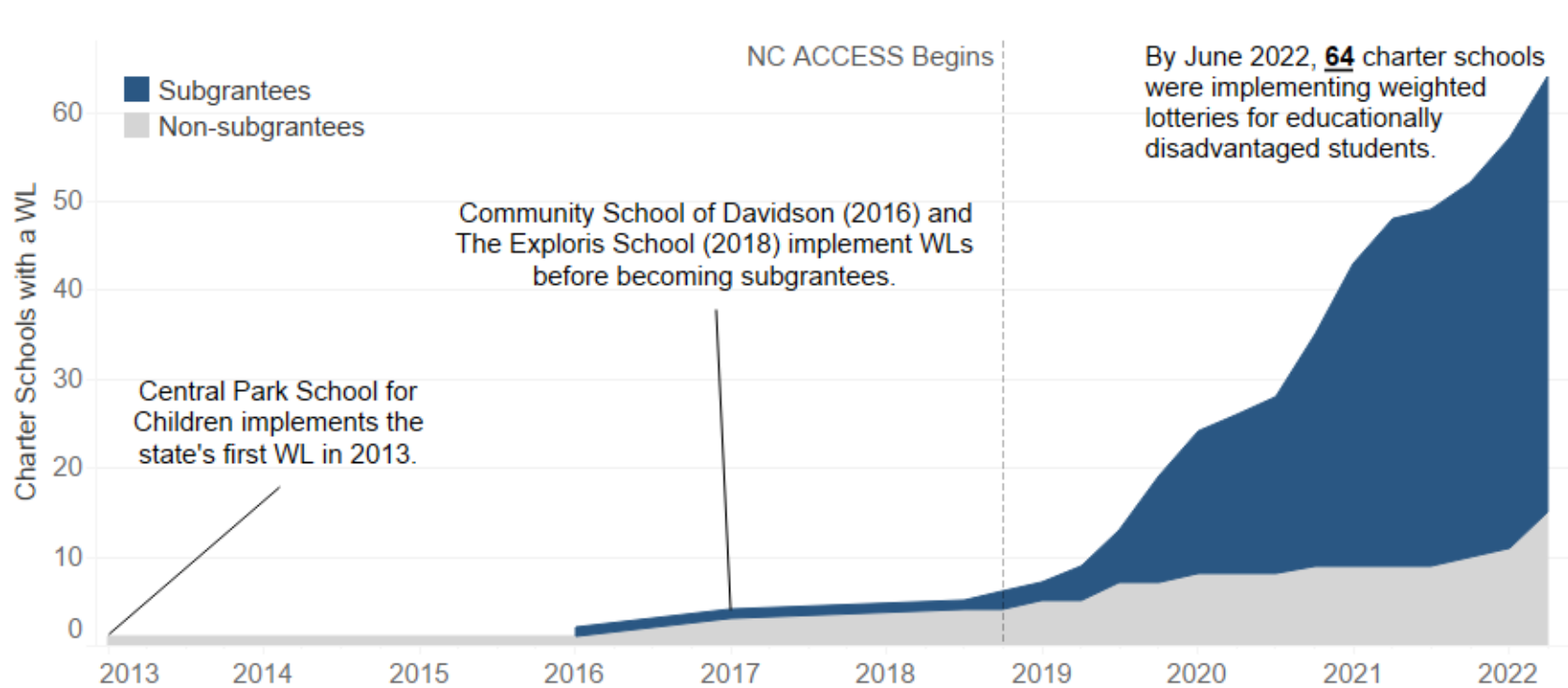
While some charter schools have operated weighted lotteries for many years, the NC ACCESS Program has dramatically increased the number of charter schools using this tool to help diversify their schools and serve the students who might otherwise have limited access to high-quality schools. As of June 2022, 64 charter schools have an approved weighted lottery in place. Coupled with a targeted marketing and recruitment plan, charters around the state are making intentional decisions to ensure that their student populations reflect the local communities they serve.

33%

of North Carolina charter schools are implementing approved weighted lotteries.

The Use of Weighted Admissions Lotteries Explodes Across NC

The NC ACCESS Program dramatically expands the number of weighted lotteries (WL) used to support the increased enrollment of educationally disadvantaged students.



Weighted lotteries, while designed to increase access for educationally disadvantaged students, are only a tool for equity in the admissions process. The majority of the work to recruit and enroll a diverse student body comes in the days, weeks, and months spent in the community talking to families and building relationships. Subgrantees are required to submit plans for intentional marketing and recruitment strategies that will ensure traditionally underserved students are informed and welcomed into the school community. Even as COVID-19 disrupted many schools plans to connect deeper with their communities, subgrantees have begun implementing many strategies around marketing and recruitment, specifically for diverse student populations, and made building authentic relationships the cornerstone of their efforts.

NC ACCESS subgrantees are monitored on the implementation of 10 specific requirements: weighted lottery, transportation, school lunch, school climate and discipline, professional development, enrollment projections, marketing and recruitment plans, SMART goals, student transition plans, and parent and community advisory councils. While each subgrantee has their given 5-year award period to fully implement, 16 subgrantees (28%) have already fully implemented all 10 requirements.

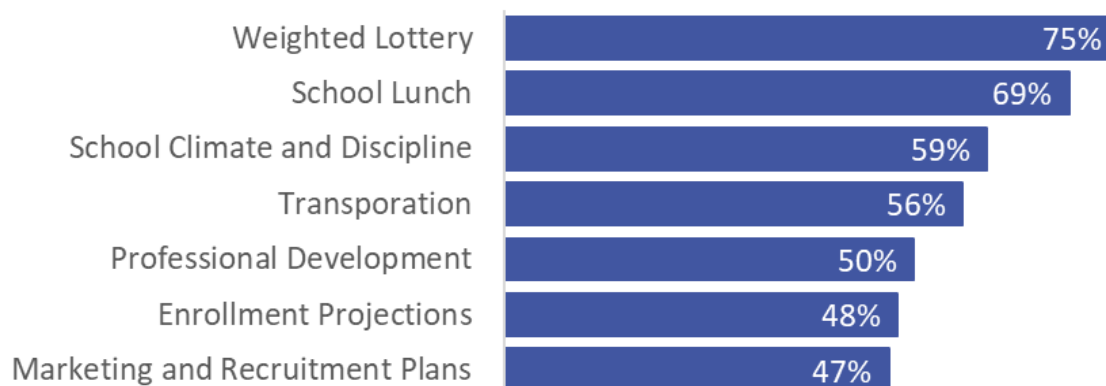
All of these strategies, taken together, are having a clear impact on subgrantee’s efforts to enroll more educationally disadvantaged students. When they applied to the Program, all NC ACCESS subgrantees submitted enrollment projections for growth over at least 5 years. Just a few years in, our schools’ efforts are already paying off, and will only continue to have a greater impact for years to come.

State enrollment data indicates that NC ACCESS subgrantees served nearly 30,000 students in the 2021-22 school year with 12,716 (43%) identified as educationally disadvantaged. The economically disadvantaged subgroup makes up the majority of those students (78%), followed by students with disabilities (23%) and English learners (13%). As noted earlier, 62% of subgrantees have met, or are within 10% of meeting, their annual enrollment targets for educationally disadvantaged students. While this is below the program’s goal of 75%, subgrantees are making significant progress in enrolling underserved students.

Ultimately, the NC ACCESS Program has a goal of 40% of subgrantees serving over 50% educationally disadvantaged students and the program is making progress towards that target. To-date, of the 51 schools that are open, 18 (35%) have reached the target of 51% or greater educationally disadvantaged enrollment. Ten schools (20%) are within a 10% margin of reaching that goal and five schools (10%) are within a 15% margin.

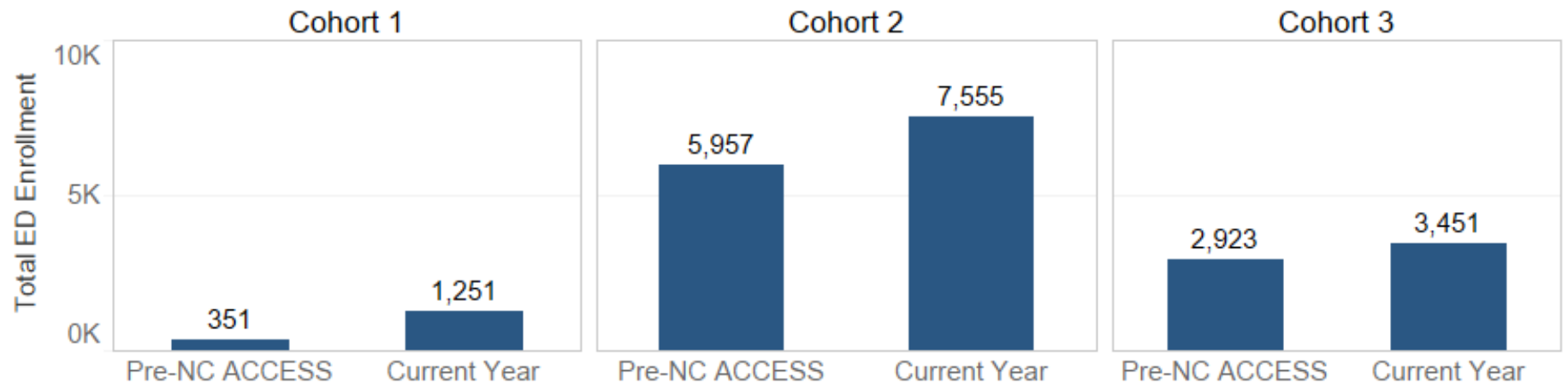
Full Implementation of Program Plans

Subgrantees have 5 years to fully implement all plans, but many have made significant progress in just the first few years, as noted below.

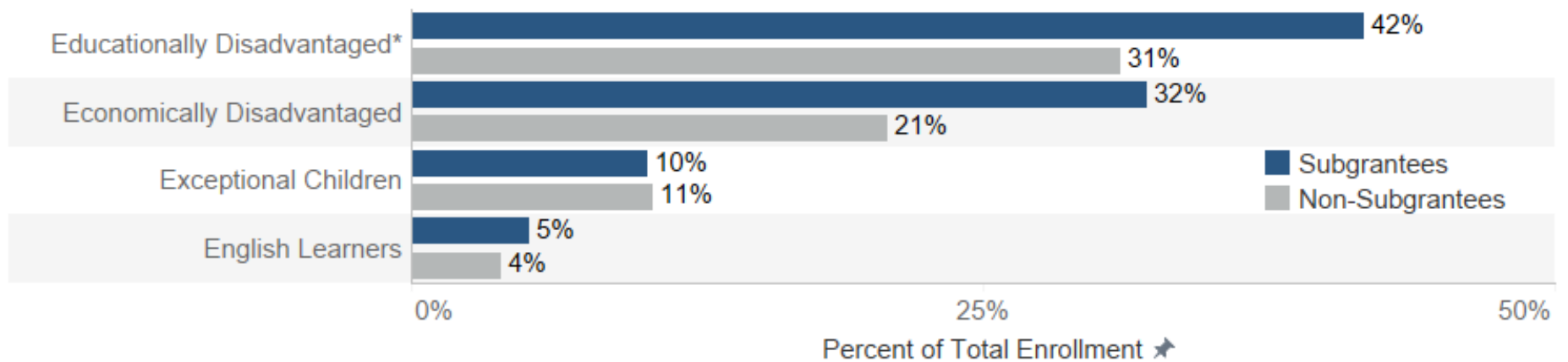


Expanded Access for Educationally Disadvantaged Students

Since the Program first awarded subgrants 3 years ago, over 3,000 additional students qualifying as educationally disadvantaged (ED) are now attending 51 high-quality charter schools across the state. For comparison, 34 active subgrantees added 1,485 ED students through the first 2 years.



On average, subgrantees are serving higher proportions of educationally disadvantaged students than non-subgrantees, including higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students and English Learners.



*"Educationally" disadvantaged includes any students who qualify as economically disadvantaged, English learners, exceptional children, experiencing homelessness, and/or migrant.

“We’re not just saying that relationships are important, but we’re structurally supporting that, in how we allocate our time and how we allocate our resources.”

-Michelle Vruwink, Principal, The Franklin School of Innovation

Fayetteville Students Train to Become Drone Pilots at Alpha Academy

by Ariana-Jasmine Castrellon | [The Fayetteville Observer](#)

Alpha Academy, a K-12th grade charter school, is providing free drone training to high school students. “This academy is preparing the next workforce generation,” Jeffries Epps, CEO of STEMERALD City LLC, said. Students can now earn a drone operator license through the academy’s Drone Remote Pilot Institute. Alpha Academy has partnered with STEMERALD City and Nine Ten Drones LLC to provide the training for staff and students. “That is a certification that is given to them by the Federal Aviation Administration, which basically permits them to commercially fly drones and charge for their services,” Epps said. The minimum starting pay for drone pilots is \$75 an hour, he said. Many corporate-level companies, such as Amazon, are now using drone delivery. Students are required to program a drone using JavaScript, a scripting language designed to run inside webpages, and build a drone from a kit before they can be certified. “The final phase now is certification,” Epps said. “We’ve taught them to think like drone pilots, we’ve taught them to build drones, now we are going to teach them the rules and regulations to be certified professional pilots.”

In order to receive certification, students must be at least 16 years of age. A payment of \$180 is required for students to take the FAA test, but once students receive certification, they are certified for life, Epps said. Students in the Drone Remote Pilot Institute spend hours after school and on the weekends training to be drone pilots. Students like Marcus Bell, a 17-year-old high school junior, who said he dreams of working at Apple or Google after he graduates from college.

Yvette Bell, the mother of Marcus, said Alpha Academy has kept her son academically motivated. “He’s always ecstatic when he does something that exceeds his expectations,” Bell said. “After he came here — everything changed, his grades improved dramatically, his attention to detail improved and his determination.” Bell said her son plans to pursue a career in information technology. “I think my favorite part would have to be starting an action, completing it and actually seeing it come through,” Marcus said about the drone program. “I think that’s pretty cool.” Marcus, who joined the academy in seventh grade, said his favorite school subjects are math and science. “The teachers are great,” he said.

Epps gave praise to the four students in the drone program for all of the hours they’ve spent training to become drone pilots. “One of the things that I want to highlight — these kids did this during the pandemic,” Epps said. “They took time out from their Saturdays to come learn this — during the pandemic — and they religiously showed up to this program.” Moving forward, Alpha Academy’s STEM Director Christopher Stinson said, all students will be required to take and pass a computer science curriculum at the academy’s Katherine G. Johnson S.T.E.M. Institute before being accepted into the Drone Remote Pilot Institute. “This summer students will have the opportunity to take the computer science prerequisite course first,” Stinson said. The four trained drone program students will be mentors during summer school for the middle school students who attend the computer science prerequisite course, Epps said about Stinson’s summer curriculum.

Developing Leaders for Equity

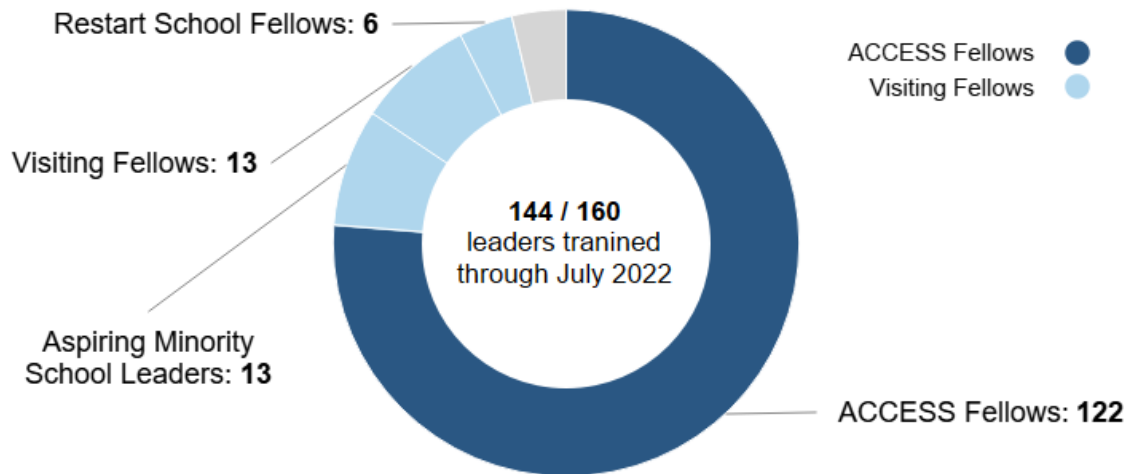


The second largest investment the NC ACCESS Program makes is supporting and promoting the development of leaders across the state. Through the ACCESS Fellowship, professional development, and targeted leadership development programming, the NC ACCESS Program is laying the groundwork for transformational, equity-minded leaders to serve and support educationally disadvantaged students all over North Carolina.

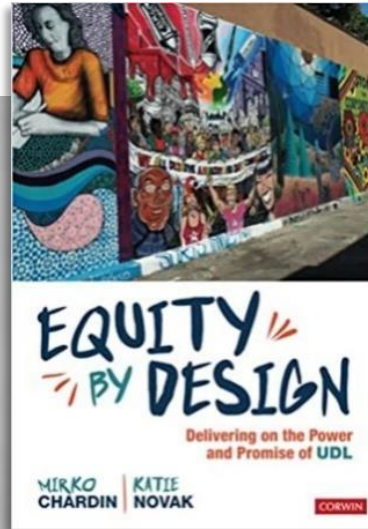
As part of the subgrant program, two leaders from each school awarded a subgrant participate in the ACCESS Fellowship – a yearlong professional development experience designed to provide subgrantees with the support and technical assistance they need in order to effectively learn, develop, and demonstrate best practices for serving educationally disadvantaged students and fostering collaboration within the charter school community and between charter and traditional public schools. Additionally, the Fellowship continues to welcome Visiting Fellows from non-subgrantee charter schools, including expanding our partnership with traditional public schools using the state’s Restart Model, inviting four district school leaders to participate in cohort 3. Through June 2022, three cohorts, totaling 144 leaders, have completed the ACCESS Fellowship, with 98% of participants reporting greater preparedness for serving educationally disadvantaged students.

A Growing Cohort of Leaders

By year 5, 160 leaders will complete the ACCESS Fellowship, a one-year professional learning experience designed to support leaders in serving educationally disadvantaged students. By July 2022, 144 leaders from charter and traditional public schools have completed the program.



Beyond the ACCESS Fellowship, the NC ACCESS Program has invested over half a million dollars in training and development for equity-focused leaders. The NC ACCESS Program continues to offer free professional development opportunities to all charter school leaders, teachers, and other staff throughout the state. In the last year alone, the NC ACCESS Program offered over 20 additional hours of free development to charter schools on a wide range of topics. Additionally, the NC ACCESS Program implemented the Aspiring Minority School Leaders Program and launched the Transformative Executive Leadership Program and LETRS training for the 2022-23 school year.



FELLOWSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Equity by Design

with Mirko Chardin

In April 2022, the ACCESS Fellowship was joined by Mirko Chardin, Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer for Novak Education and co-author of “Equity by Design: Delivering on the Power and Promise of UDL”.

Equity by Design is intended to serve as a blueprint for teachers to alter the all-too-predictable outcomes for our historically underserved students. A first of its kind resource, the book makes the critical link between social justice and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) so that we can equip students and teachers, with the will, skill, and collective capacity to enact positive change.

This session provided ACCESS Fellows with evidence-based application of best practices for UDL and concrete strategies for designing and delivering a culturally responsive, sustainable, and equitable framework for all students to ensure, in Chardin’s words, we “treat our learners with the unequivocal respect and dignity they deserve.”



Aspiring Minority School Leaders Program

In May 2022, 11 aspiring leaders of color completed the NC ACCESS Program's Aspiring Minority School Leaders Program in partnership with Appalachian State University. The 2-year partnership included 24 credit hours of coursework provided by Appalachian State and a school-based internship experience. Additionally, each leader participated in the 2020-21 ACCESS Fellowship. These emerging leaders are now fully licensed with a North Carolina School Administrator's License and ready to become North Carolina public school leaders. Three leaders have already been promoted into school leader roles.

Charter School Transformative Executive Leadership Program

The NC ACCESS Program and Office of Charter Schools has launched the newly created Charter School Transformative Executive Leadership Program to provide high-quality, customized professional coaching for a cohort of charter school leaders with a focus on dramatically accelerating their leadership capacity and improving student outcomes at schools designated as low- or continually low-performing.

Transformational principal leadership is critical to turning around low-performing schools. This year-long cohort learning experience is designed to examine the implementation and evaluation of programmatic strategies, the effectiveness of the decision-making process, and the engagement of multiple stakeholders by a transformational leader engaged in an agenda of change in low-performing schools.

The Charter School Transformative Executive Leadership Program is facilitated by Alex Quigley, Executive Director of Healthy Start Academy and former Chair of the North Carolina Charter School Advisory Board and Jason Jowers, principal of Eno Valley Elementary School.

Science of Reading (LETRS) Training and Support

In furthering our mission to ensure high-quality charter schools in North Carolina, the NC ACCESS Program and Office of Charter Schools will provide charter school leaders and teachers the opportunity to engage in LETRS training. Over 200 charter school teachers and 100 charter school administrators will be able to participate in the trainings beginning September of 2022.

LETRS is a suite of professional development offerings that bridges deep, meaningful research into practical application. It provides educators with the background, depth of knowledge and tools to teach language and literacy skills to every student. LETRS professional development addresses four critical outcomes for effective literacy instruction: (1) understanding the science of reading, (2) converting research to practice, (3) enhancing teacher effectiveness and (4) transforming instruction by understanding the “why” behind science and evidence-based research, educators can effectively know how to aid students in learning to read. LETRS professional learning is relevant and applicable and designed to be the cornerstone of a multiyear, systemic literacy improvement initiative.

“The training provided by the NC ACCESS Program is unbelievable. It is training that I am paying \$20,000 for our teachers and leaders to get. It is invaluable. If you implement this training with fidelity, you will see improvement in your school.”

-Cheryl Turner, Chair, Charter School Advisory Board, on the impact of NC ACCESS development programming

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. By implementing subgrants to support educationally disadvantaged students, as well as participating in the ACCESS Fellowship, each subgrantee is expected to develop, implement, and disseminate promising practices that are working to support all students in their schools. Over the past three years, the NC ACCESS Program has partnered with ImplementEd to help schools develop and disseminate the best practices they are implementing. The team at ImplementEd surveys, interviews, and collects data from each subgrantee school to help curate and develop easy-to-use Best Practice Implementation Summaries.

By July 2022, 67 Best Practice Implementation Summaries had been shared on the NC ACCESS website from 40 schools. The strategies shared cover several areas of focus including equity and school culture, marketing and recruitment, family and community engagement, and many more.

The Best Practice Implementation Summaries created through the NC ACCESS Program will continue to live on our website for anyone to access and benefit from at any time. However, our subgrantees are also presenting these practices and strategies across the state and nation to ensure more educators can learn from them. In Spring 2022, the NC ACCESS Program hosted its first “Increase Your Reach” webinar series, designed to allow our ACCESS Fellows to present their strategies virtually to charter leaders around the state and answer questions about implementation and results.



BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT

DON'T LEAVE THE BOYS BEHIND

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.

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. 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.

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. 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.

In comparing testing data from 2018-19 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 in 2019-20 and even further to a 1.7-point gap in 2020-21. Likewise, the 11.7-point gap in math decreased to an 8-point gap in the first year and a 2.4-point gap in 2020-21. In science, the changes were so dramatic that the boys have surpassed the girls' scores by 3.4 points.

Explore the entire best practices library at ncaccessprogram.com/best-practices

As in-person conferences and gatherings continue to return, our subgrantees will use those platforms to present as well, expanding the audience for other educators to learn about our library of strategies. Based on self-reported survey results from the 2021-22 school year, NC ACCESS schools have participated in 9 North Carolina based conferences, 1 conference in Georgia, and 7 virtual conferences, for a total of 17 conference presentations. Finally, schools have disseminated best practices in over 190 events, including sharing with other schools (16) and providing school-based PD (108).

With an ever-growing and robust library of strategies, as well as a large cohort of leaders who have completed the ACCESS Fellowship, there is a wealth of information and resources that the NC ACCESS Program and our leaders will continue to disseminate through collaborative events. While the COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for in-person collaborative efforts, the NC ACCESS Program is putting a special focus on bringing both public charter schools and traditional public schools together to collaborate and share in the coming years.

Program Financials



As a recipient of federal funds, the NC ACCESS Program takes great care to account for the use and impact of the money spent. 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 2022 the Program has expended \$8,795,850 (or 24%) of the total CSP award through direct payments and subgrantee reimbursements. \$7,416,349 has been expended in reimbursements to subgrantees; \$1,073,462 for technical assistance costs; and \$306,039 for administrative costs. The total obligations of the grant as of June 30, 2022 were \$33,366,899 (91% of total CSP award), which includes awarded subgrant funding that has not yet been expended and reimbursed, as well as planned leadership development and training scheduled for the 2022-23 school year.

CSP Grant Expenditures Progress

'Total Expenditures' represents all payments and reimbursements made as of June 30, 2022. 'Obligated Funding' represents additional funding awarded to subgrantees or planned for future activities that has not yet been reimbursed or expended.



As noted, the subgrant program is by far the largest category of expenses for the NC ACCESS Program. Through June 30, 2022, the Program has held four competitive subgrant cycles to award funding to schools committed to serving more educationally disadvantaged students. The average award amount for subgrantees is around \$530,000, with more established schools applying for expansion or replication receiving larger awards.

All subgrantees must submit requests for reimbursement to the Program.

Only once those requests are approved for allowability and alignment to a school’s budget is the money released to the school. Major areas of investment for schools continue to include transportation services, instructional supplies and materials, marketing and recruitment costs, and student support services like extended learning opportunities and mental health supports.

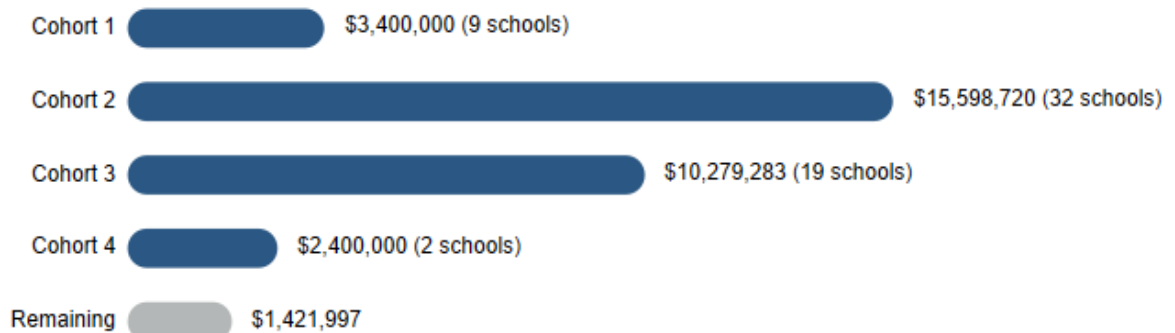
Subgrantees from cohorts 1 and 2 are now in the second half of their 5-year award period and are expected to make substantial progress toward spending down their NC ACCESS funds. Three subgrantees have already exhausted funds in accordance with their approved applications and more will follow in the next 1-2 years. Overall subgrant expenditures are currently below what the Program would have initially predicted, primarily due to effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the influx of ESSER and CARES Act funding.

Along with increased subgrant expenditures, the NC ACCESS Program continues to invest heavily in technical assistance and professional development. The Program is sponsoring LETRS training for 200 teachers and 100 administrators, as well as launching the Executive Transformative Leadership Program and a hosting a fourth ACCESS Fellowship cohort. The NC ACCESS Program expects to invest an additional \$400,000 during the 2022-23 school year to support these, and other, development opportunities for NC charter schools.

Administrative costs, while the smallest area of investment for the Program, will increase for the upcoming year as subgrantee monitoring remains a priority to hold schools accountable.

How much have subgrantees been awarded?

\$31.7m have been awarded to approved subgrantees through four cycles, with an average award amount of \$530,000. The remaining \$1.4m will be awarded as new subgrants or supplemental funding during the 2022-23 school year.





What's Next...

Much of what we will experience over the next few years is unknown: new operating norms will come from the effects of COVID-19; the full extent of academic and social emotional needs of students is still coming into focus; and the general disruptions and uncertainty could reemerge at any time.

But here's what we do know: our schools are ready. We've trained 144 leaders through our Fellowship, countless more through PD and other opportunities, and will continue to focus on their development in the coming year. They have risen to every challenge thrown at them and remain hungry to learn more and do better. The NC ACCESS Program will be there with them, providing another Fellowship cohort, leadership coaching, LETRS training, instructional support, and other targeted PD to ensure they have as many tools and resources as we can provide. Our leaders have put themselves on the path to success. The supports, strategies, and partners we are investing in should further accelerate the already promising academic outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students.

Our schools have set a high bar, and we will continue to hold them to that. Now that most subgrant funding has been awarded, the NC ACCESS Program has prioritized an intense schedule of monitoring and support; making sure every subgrantee has what they need to be successful and is being held accountable.

Finally, with a growing library of best practices and 60+ schools leading the way in supporting educationally disadvantaged students, the NC ACCESS Program will focus on increasing collaboration by disseminating best practices, creating charter/district networks, and bringing schools together to learn from one another.

The past 2 years brought enormous challenges for everyone in education but, coming out of COVID, this Program is poised to have an even bigger impact and continue to transform the charter sector in North Carolina.



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