

# NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



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

## Marketing and Recruitment

## Increased Reach

### #SBHatHome

#### Implementation Description

Sallie B. Howard School of Arts & Science (SBH), located in Wilson, NC, is committed to providing students with a global education by employing international faculty members, offering study abroad programs, and providing world class training to students in the fine arts and sciences. Sallie B. Howard sought to improve digital connections with both their currently enrolled families and their community at large, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. When SBH added ninth grade in the 2020-21 academic year, they began focusing on expansive marketing efforts that would expose the community to their burgeoning high school program.

With the help of available NC ACCESS funding, school leadership hired a marketing agency to enhance their digital communications. Initial first steps included updating their school [website](#) and launching a student blog. Once these pieces were in place, the marketing agency increased their web traffic by boosting the likelihood the school would appear in relevant internet searches. This practice, known as Search Engine Optimization, involves strategies, such as improving key words and embedding social media platforms (Entrepreneur, 2016). Improving Search Engine Optimization, updating websites, and starting a blog are all beneficial marketing strategies for schools (Major, 2021). Additionally, they prioritized increasing their bilingual web communication. For example, two orientation events were hosted on Facebook Live,

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#### About This School

#### Sallie B. Howard School of Arts & Science

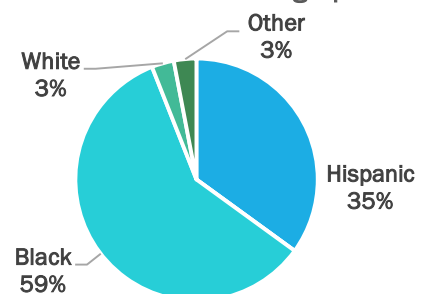
Sallie B. Howard School of Arts & Science (SBHS) is a Title I school unique in its financial and human investment in providing world class training and career opportunities to students in the fine arts and science. We consistently provide 3-week travel and study abroad opportunities for middle and high school students to countries worldwide, including China, India, Australia, South Africa, East Africa, Mexico, and Cuba. We employ an international faculty from India, the Philippines, Columbia, Mexico, the Caribbean, to further expose our students to a global world. We have a unique and explicit instructional model with strategies and practices which account for growing student success in the recent years. Providing pre professional biotech programs to HS students in eastern NC leading to community college certification and professional career opportunities in research and science is yet another unique asset of SBHS.

**Year School Opened:** 1997-98

**Grant Awarded:** 2020-21

**Initial Grade Levels Served:** K-8

#### 2020-21 Student Demographics



**% ED Student Population:** 80%

**Urbanicity:** Rural / Wilson, NC

**Persons in Poverty (Wilson County)<sup>5</sup>:** 21.5%

one in English and one in Spanish. Spanish-speaking families who attended the [Orientacion de Padres](#) were able to ask questions and quickly receive answers in their native tongue in the comments section. Studies have shown when schools translate materials and employ bilingual interpreters, Spanish-speaking family members feel more informed and engaged (Bickmore, 2013). Recordings of these events remained available on the school's Facebook account and website, so future prospective families can benefit from them as well.

SBH leadership also employed digital tools to stay connected with currently enrolled families during virtual learning. For example, the school staff established a specific email address and regularly checked it in order to provide families with an efficient way to receive school updates and request technical assistance during COVID-19. Since many of their families are active on Facebook, the school utilized their Facebook account to post engaging and interactive [videos](#) recognizing the achievements of students and staff. They hosted a [#SBHatHome Contest](#) in which students were invited to submit a photo or 60-second video to school leadership showing what they had been doing during the Covid-19 school closure. Numerous submissions were posted on the school's Facebook account and entered for a chance to win a \$50 Walmart card or dinner delivered to their home. The school created intentionally diverse social media posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which highlighted fine arts performances, science experiments, staff members, and school events in order to present a well-rounded picture of what their school has to offer.

Going beyond the school's internet presence, SBH utilized other marketing strategies as well. The leadership commissioned a cable television [commercial](#) and secured [interviews](#) at local news stations, including a [Black History Month](#) feature. Finally, they sent a direct mail campaign to 58,000 households across five counties to promote the school's new Biotechnology Training Center (BTC), which prepares students for a career at one of the many local biotechnology businesses. The school also hosted some socially-distanced events, such as student [Meet-Ups](#) and an [Early-Voting Drive-Up Rally](#), which was made possible through partnerships with the Black Transformation Movement, the Wilson Police Department, and local radio station Power 95.5. All of the school's marketing and engagement efforts helped currently enrolled families stay connected through COVID-19 and publicized Sallie B. Howard's offerings to a larger audience.

## Results

As a result of the school's increased marketing efforts, high school enrollment increased from 53 to 117 students. Website traffic and phone calls to the school also increased. Engaging families with social media proved to be effective as each of their Facebook Live events garnered an average of 250-300 active viewers, and several video posts had well over 1,000 views. Additionally, advertising campaigns focused on the school's new Biotechnology center caused the majority of their newly enrolled high school students to choose a concentration in biotechnology.

## Challenges

Due to COVID-19 safety guidelines, scheduling tours for prospective families was a significant challenge for SBH. While the school was able to conduct some in-person tours, they reached a

larger audience with virtual tours. School leaders presented virtual tours of the biotech lab to organizations such as the Wilson Chamber of Commerce, the Wilson Rotary Club, Imagination Station and elected officials Rep. Linda Cooper Suggs, Sen. Toby Fitch and Wilson County Schools Superintendent Lane Mills.

## Future Modifications

School leadership found that many of their families engaged digitally more frequently than they had in-person before the pandemic. As a result, the school plans to continue prioritizing digital tools of communication and social media moving forward.

## Critical Components

### Getting Started

School leadership found it imperative to develop engaging content which accurately represented their brand. Additionally, they wanted their communications to reach a diverse audience and be accessible for Spanish-speaking families.

### Ongoing Supports

SBH leadership recommends consistently creating new and relevant content, regularly updating the website, and following a reliable posting timeline in order to keep families engaged long-term.

## Equity Connections

Connecting with families through virtual events and social media posts is particularly helpful for families experiencing poverty who do not have access to reliable transportation or may have complicated work schedules (Escobar, 2020). While SBH initially increased their virtual communication offerings to families as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, they plan to continue providing these options to help families stay engaged and informed with their child(ren)'s education.

## Research

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