

NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



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

School Culture

Social Emotional Learning

Not Your Grandmother's CCR

Implementation Description

Sugar Creek Charter School (SCCS) of Charlotte is dedicated to eradicating generational poverty. One of the ways SCCS strives toward this goal is through their unique college and career readiness (CCR) program. Access to a comprehensive CCR program has been proven to prepare students for “*skilled employment in the modern economy*” (Kostyo, Cardichon, & Darling-Hammond, 2018), a key factor in eradicating poverty.

Sugar Creek's leadership knows that students in poverty have unique needs. Often the cultural differences between students' homelife and the school setting can be difficult for students to navigate. Therefore, SCCS lays a foundation for a strong CCR program by facilitating an annual professional development to help teachers better understand the challenges of poverty. In a recent training, teachers boarded a bus and traveled to their students' neighborhoods collecting data on the community assets available, such as playgrounds, banks, libraries, and grocery stores. The impact of poverty was eye opening for many staff members as the access to these resources were significantly less than in other parts of the city. Additionally, school leaders challenged teachers to assemble a nutritious family meal with materials from the dollar store as compared to Harris Teeter. Both accessibility and cost became important factors. These experiences led to thoughtful conversations about the daily realities of students living in poverty. When teachers are well trained in the nuances of poverty, they are better prepared to lead their students. Developing meaningful professional development on the topic of poverty is crucial to Sugar Creek's strong CCR program.

Sugar Creek's next strategy for addressing generational poverty is the implementation of a strong socio-emotional learning curriculum from kindergarten through twelfth grade. According to research, a well-rounded CCR program focuses on social skills as well as academic achievement (Hanover

About This School

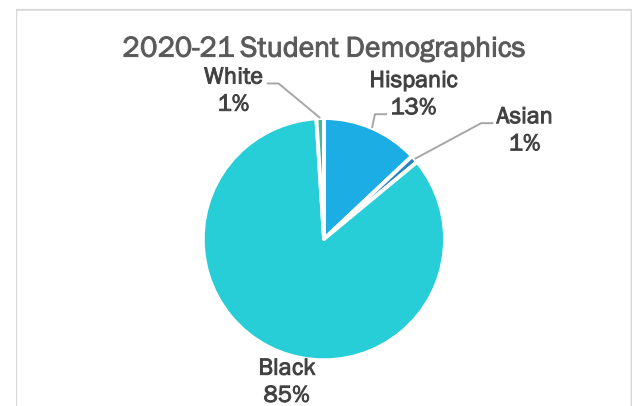
Sugar Creek Charter School

Sugar Creek's mission is to eradicate generational poverty by providing a college and career preparatory education from kindergarten to 12th grade. Sugar Creek's vision is to serve as many children as possible and to work with them in their formative years so that they become well educated and productive citizens as adults.

Year School Opened: 1999-2000

Grant Awarded: 2020-21

Initial Grade Levels Served: K-12



% ED Student Population: 94%

Urbanicity: Urban / Charlotte, NC

Persons in Poverty (Mecklenburg County)⁵: 10.3%

July 28, 2021

Research, 2014). Sugar Creek's CCR kindergarten program teaches skills, such as how to set a table, how to apologize, and how to applaud a neighbor. High school students participate in a daily class with a certified counselor, in which part of the curriculum focuses on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), such as communication, relationship skills, responsibility, and tenacity. Throughout the program, the lessons remain both practical and age appropriate. The staff understands the importance of explicitly teaching these skills just as they would traditional academics, such as reading and arithmetic.

Sugar Creek knows that higher education is a pathway out of poverty. Therefore, SCCS believes that it is important to prepare every student for college and instill confidence that every student can be accepted for admission, whether or not they choose to attend. Beginning in the ninth grade, students collaborate with an assigned counselor to create a long-range plan for higher education. Quite different from traditional counselor-student settings in which students meet with their counselors once a twice a year, students at Sugar Creek participate in a daily CCR class with their counselor throughout high school. As a part of this class, students receive ACT preparation, financial aid informational sessions, and support for writing college application essays. Students are asked to think critically about which school best fits their goals without causing excessive debt. Students are required to apply for at least six colleges and eight scholarships. Beyond academic readiness, their CCR program includes a unit designed to prepare students for common challenges for young college students, such as furnishing a dorm room, sharing living space with new roommates, recognizing risky behavior, budgeting, and navigating free credit card offers. CCR also exposes students to community services, so they can be prepared to face a world away from their home-town support systems. Addressing both the academic needs and life skill needs of future college students removes the multifaceted barriers associated with college success.

After a few years of promoting college as the only pathway to success, school leadership began to realize that college may not align with every student's goal or interest. For example, a student who wants to be a biotech engineer requires a college degree to meet that goal. However, a student who wants to open a barber shop or a nail salon does not necessarily need a four-year degree. As a result, in 2020-21, SCCS began offering career-based classes and programs for students. Most of the students participating in the entrepreneurship class have started businesses, including a podcast and a bakery. Two SCCS board members are in the process of establishing internship programs in the fields of auto body repair, health care, and technology. Career readiness classes also focus on soft skills, such as maintaining professionalism in the workplace, which helped one student retain a job while her gossiping co-workers were let go.

Results

SCCS students have a 100% acceptance rate into four-year colleges and universities. They had their first graduating class in 2018, and now many of their alumni are beginning to graduate from college or have begun their careers.

Participant surveys revealed that students find CCR at Sugar Creek to be an extremely valuable piece of their education.

Challenges

Retaining eight counselors to teach the high school CCR classes for 350 students is an expensive undertaking, especially since every certified counselor has - at minimum - a master's degree. SCCS believes that this is a necessary investment in the overall success of their students.

Future Modifications

SCCS plans to formalize their alumni follow up efforts by compiling alumni information in a spreadsheet. This structure will help Sugar Creek measure their effectiveness with program goals. Additionally, the data will enable the staff to act as reflective practitioners and make adjustments to their program to benefit future students.

Critical Components

Getting Started

School leadership believes that CCR can only be successful if staff members understand the students' background and experiences. SCCS's poverty training initiatives develop high quality educators who are skilled in working with students in poverty.

Certified counselors are also an essential component, because they have extensive knowledge and training in providing personal guidance.

Ongoing Supports

SCCS asserts that it is critical for students to meet with the same counselor all four years of high school. They have found that this consistency and longevity helps students to feel more comfortable and open discussing potentially uncomfortable topics.

Equity Connections

Research has shown that a traditional high school education alone often does not prepare students for college or a successful career, and cannot mitigate the effects of poverty (Moore, N.d) (Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, 2017). Therefore, Sugar Creek designed their school to address the nonacademic factors associated with poverty, including socio-emotional skills and long-range planning. Sugar Creek offers extensive counseling to help students prepare for college, career, and build a variety of skills to ensure eradication of poverty.

SCCS provides poverty training for faculty as it is essential for their teachers to understand the culture and background of their students.

Research

1. Hanover Research. (September 24, 2014). "Why College and Career Readiness is an Integral Component of K-12 Education". Accessed on June 3, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.hanoverresearch.com/insights-blog/why-college-and-career-readiness-is-an-integral-component-of-k-12-education/>
2. Kostyo, S., Cardichon, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (October 3, 2018). "Expanding Access to a College- and Career-Ready Curriculum: Making ESSA's Equity Promise Real: State Strategies to Close the Opportunity Gap". Learning Policy Institute. Accessed on June 3, 2021. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/essa-equity-promise-college-career-brief>
3. Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools. (March 2017). "Equity and Excellence in College and Career Readiness: Study of Education in Battle Creek Michigan". NYU Steinhardt. Accessed on June 3, 2021. Retrieved from https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-06/BC_Vision_Study_Recommendations_Web.pdf

4. Moore, A. (N.d.). "Are Students Prepared for College?". Education Equity. Accessed on June 3, 2021. Retrieved from <https://eduequityforall.com/college-readiness/>
5. United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts North Carolina, Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045219>