

NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



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

Marketing and Recruitment

Community Engagement

Foot and Mask Recruitment

Implementation Description

Telra Institute (Telra), located in South Charlotte, is dedicated to instilling in students a lifelong sense of curiosity, passion, initiative, and tenacity, rooted in high expectations and a supportive environment. In order to ensure that all families in their service area are aware of Telra's offerings, the school embarked on a marketing strategy that intentionally included a commitment to ensure that any barriers for families were reduced or eliminated. The threefold approach to reducing these barriers included implementing a weighted lottery, providing transportation, and offering a healthy lunch to all students. Research has shown that food insecurity (Wong, et al, 2016) and a lack of transportation (Valant & Lincove, 2018) prevent access to school choice and can be barriers to academic achievement. Telra is committed to offering an education program that focuses on personalized learning, which increases academic engagement and success for all students (Morin, N.d.) Once the plans to reduce these barriers were in place, Telra began marketing and recruitment for the opening year, 2021-22.

The school recognized that social distancing restrictions during COVID-19 necessitated the need to establish a social media campaign and to redesign their school website in order to clearly communicate the school's identity and mission. Due to the availability of NC ACCESS funds, Telra was able to hire web designers and marketing consultants. Once the website was launched, they developed a social media marketing strategy and connected with prospective parents through this outlet. NC ACCESS funds also allowed Telra to hire a school principal at the beginning of 2021. Each week, the school founder/chancellor and school principal jointly hosted virtual office hours to connect with families and answer questions using Microsoft Teams.

About This School

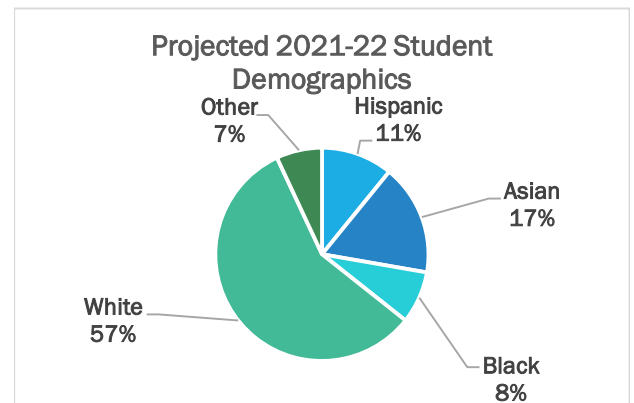
Telra Institute

Telra Institute provides a rigorous, differentiated educational environment for K-5 students. Our accelerated curriculum challenges advanced & gifted learners while building foundational critical thinking & reasoning skills, mathematical & literary fluency, resilience, and a problem-solving mindset. Students at Telra benefit from small class sizes, a full-time gifted & talented curriculum, high expectations, and personalized support designed to maximize every child's growth.

Year School Opened: 2021-22

Grant Awarded: 2020-21

Initial Grade Levels Served: K-3



% ED Student Population: 19%

Urbanicity: Suburban / Matthews, NC

Persons in Poverty (Mecklenburg County)⁵: 14.2%

Going beyond virtual marketing, the school leadership valued face to face connections. Given COVID-19 safety guidelines, the team developed their “foot and mask” recruitment initiative. They donned their face masks and set out to have face-to-face conversation whenever possible, knocking on the doors of organizations that serve families who may benefit from Telra’s unique educational approach. These one-on-one meetings took place with a number of local organizations who serve at-risk families, such as Charlotte’s Catholic Diocese, Soccer Shots, the Soccer Foundation, local YMCA after school programs, the International House, and Project 658. This diverse list of organizations allows the school to make connections in immigrant and refugee communities that may not have access to typical social media outlets. The school also visited six medical practices that serve twice exceptional children with diagnoses, such as Asperger’s syndrome, attention disorders, or autism. These intentional interactions informed parents of the benefits of Telra’s individualized instructional approach. While this was labor intensive initially, Telra leadership believes that as families experience success for their children, recruitment will begin to happen organically through word of mouth and less time will be spent on one-to-one recruitment. Also, while some of these efforts may not bear fruit right away in terms of increased enrollment, the relationships formed lay the groundwork for recruiting Educationally Disadvantaged students in future years.

Results

Telra had hoped to enroll 240 students in their first year of operation. Enrollment is still open, but their projected enrollment for the year is around 250. They expect to meet or exceed their Year One target of 13% Educationally Disadvantaged students.

Challenges

Telra leadership found it challenging to build relationships within the community in the midst of COVID-19 social distancing mandates. They addressed this challenge by connecting with families virtually and making appointments for “*foot and mask*” (Cecilia Armour, personal interview, May 27, 2021) recruitment with local organizations.

Future Modifications

Telra plans to continue their social media presence and connections with targeted organizations. In addition, they plan to host live, in-person events as COVID-19 regulations continue to ease.

Critical Components

Getting Started

Without NC ACCESS funds at their disposal, Telra would not have been able to hire a principal or the web-designers and marketing experts who helped them establish a unique school identity and electronically communicate the school’s brand to the community when in-person marketing was not an option.

Ongoing Supports

The school will require additional funding in order to continue offering transportation and meals to students in a sustainable manner, so as to honor the promises of their recruitment advertising.

Equity Connections

Telra advertised their services to medical practices who serve twice exceptional children, because they are most likely to benefit from individualized instruction. Offering this kind of instruction to all students, as Telra does, helps neurodiverse children feel equal to their classmates (Burke, 2019) and “*reduce[s] the stigma of special education*” (Morin, N.d.). The school also strives to provide meals and transportation to any student in need. These are two prominent barriers to families regarding school choice and academic success (Valant & Lincove, 2018) (Wong, et al, 2016).

Research

1. Burke, M. (January 31, 2019). “Help disadvantaged students learn”. Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC): Education in Chemistry. Accessed on May 28, 2021. Retrieved from <https://edu.rsc.org/ideas/how-to-help-disadvantaged-students-learn/3010053.article>
2. Morin, A. (N.d.). “Personalized learning: What you need to know”. Understood. Accessed on June 1, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/partnering-with-childs-school/instructional-strategies/personalized-learning-what-you-need-to-know>
3. Valant, J. & Lincove, J.A. (March 16, 2018). “The Barriers that make charter schools inaccessible to disadvantaged families”. The Brookings Institute. Accessed on June 1, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/03/16/the-barriers-that-make-charter-schools-inaccessible-to-disadvantaged-families/>
4. Wong, J. C., Scott, T., Wilde, P., Li, Y. G., Tucker, K. L., Gao, X. (July 27, 2016). “Food Insecurity Is Associated with Subsequent Cognitive Decline in the Boston Puerto Rican Health Study”. *The Journal of Nutrition*: Volume 146, Issue 9, September 2016, Pages 1740–1745. Accessed on June 1, 2021. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.115.228700>
5. United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts North Carolina, Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045219>