

NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



Lunch and Transportation

Reducing Barriers

Lunch and a Ride

Implementation Description

Wilmington School of the Arts (WSA) is focused on serving educationally disadvantaged (ED) students living in Wilmington, NC’s urban housing neighborhoods. These students are traditionally enrolled in New Hanover County Schools (NHCS), the local education agency (LEA). While WSA is focused on recruiting from low socioeconomic communities and city housing projects, research shows that lack of a free lunch services can impose a significant barrier to enrollment and attendance for low income families (Frankenberg, et.al., 2010). In order to reduce potential barriers to enrollment for these families, school leadership recognized the importance of ensuring that the school was able to provide lunch and a transportation plan. In addition to reducing barriers, research shows that students who have access to a nutritious lunch are healthier and show improved academic performance (Anderson, 2017; “Nutrition and Students,” 2014). In order to provide lunch to qualified students enrolled at WSA, the school is cultivating a partnership with NHCS’ Free and Reduced Lunch Program. In this model, NHCS prepares the food and their Child Nutrition Office transports it to WSA, placing it in school warmers where it’s ready to be served to students. The Meals Plus Program through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) provides support in identifying students who qualify for free and reduced lunch and since this is a federally funded program, there is a simple Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the school and the local LEA, in this case NHCS.

While some educationally disadvantaged families may be interested in enrolling in a charter school, concerns over providing basic nutrition for their children become an essential and all-consuming priority. The USDA states 13.6% of families struggle with food insecurity (USDA, 2020). Typically,

June 18, 2020

About This School

Wilmington School of the Arts

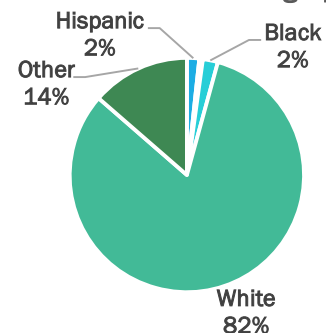
We believe that students achieve the greatest results when they have the freedom to discover and explore their creative interests. Our students will participate in a robust arts program and a rigorous academic experience that is mutually supportive in developing students’ self-confidence, creative expression, critical thinking, and communication skills.

Year School Opened: 2020-21

Grant Awarded: 2019-20

Initial Grade Levels Served: K-2

2019-20 Student Demographics



% ED Student Population: 48%

Urbanicity: Urban / Wilmington, NC

Persons in Poverty (New Hanover County)⁵: 15.3%

these families would qualify for free and reduced lunch in their communities' traditional public school. Despite the programs offered, if a charter school does not provide free and reduced lunch for students in need, these families, in essence, lose out of the school choice options experienced by wealthier households. Additionally, food insecurity is directly linked with poor cognitive functioning (Wong 2016). It is quite difficult for a child to focus on multi-step word problems on an empty stomach! Therefore, free and reduced lunch programs level the playing field to give economically disadvantaged families choices about where to enroll their children in school, while also promoting the physical health and academic success of the child.

While providing lunch for qualifying students is one way to reduce barriers for families, another potential barrier to enrollment is access to transportation (Valant, 2018). In order to meet this need and utilizing funds afforded by the NC ACCESS grant opportunity, the school has allocated funds to purchase two buses, one that is new and one that will require some upgrades to meet current DOT standards. Based on parent input, the school will establish satellite stops convenient for families who need bus service to and from school for their child(ren).

Results

There are no results to report at this time. More information will be available following the opening of the school in fall 2020.

Challenges

The greatest challenge in partnering with the LEA to provide lunches to students who qualify for free and reduced lunch services is ensuring there is a positive relationship between that LEA and the charter school. Another possible challenge is simply knowing that this type of partnership is an option.

Future Modifications

This will be implemented for the first time in the fall of 2020 when the school opens, so there are no known modifications at this time.

Critical Components

Getting Started

The first step to providing lunch using this strategy is to establish a positive mutually beneficial partnership with the LEA and then to enter into a MOU with that system.

Providing bus transportation to students on day one requires the purchase and modification of buses in advance of the start of school.

Ongoing Supports

In order for this to work effectively, it requires that the school and the LEA have a positive working relationship.

Additional buses may be required as school enrollment grows.

Equity Connections

Families and students living in economically challenged areas are less likely to have access to reliable options for transportation, which often prevents families from pursuing enrollment in schools of choice (Teske et.al., 2009). Similarly, by providing transportation, WSA is addressing this perennial barrier to enrollment.

Research

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- 2.) Anderson, M. (March 22, 2017) *Do Healthy Lunches Improve Student Test Scores?* The Atlantic. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/03/do-healthy-lunches-improve-student-test-scores/520272/>
- 3.) (January 2014) *Nutrition and Students' Academic Performance*. Wilder Research. Retrieved from https://www.wilder.org/sites/default/files/imports/Cargill_lit_review_1-14.pdf
- 4.) Wong, J. C., Scott, T., Wilde, P., Li, Y. G., Tucker, K. L., Gao, X. (2016). *Food Insecurity Is Associated with Subsequent Cognitive Decline in the Boston Puerto Rican Health Study*. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 146(9), 1740–1745. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.115.228700>
- 5.) Valant, J., Lincove, J.A. (March 16, 2018) *The Barriers that make charter schools inaccessible to disadvantaged families*. The Brookings Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/03/16/the-barriers-that-make-charter-schools-inaccessible-to-disadvantaged-families/>
- 6.) Teske, P., Fitzpatrick, J., O'Brien, T. (July 2009) *Drivers of Choice: Parents, Transportation, and School Choice* University of Washington Center on Reinventing Public education. Retrieved from: https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/pub_dscr_teske_jul09_0.pdf
- 7.) United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts North Carolina, Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045219>