
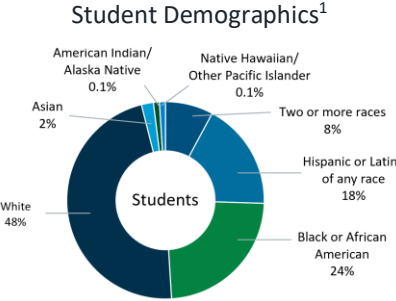
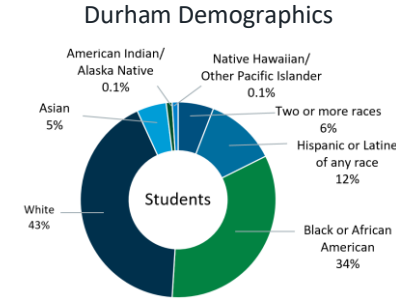




BRIDGES COLLABORATIVE MEMBER PROFILE

Central Park School for Children



Organization type: Charter Management Organization

Location: Durham, North Carolina	Population	
	<h3>Student Demographics¹</h3> 	<h3>Durham Demographics</h3> 
Size		Year Founded
 <p>The school serves approximately 595 students. Thirty-eight percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.</p> <p>Durham is a city in North Carolina with a population of approximately 292,000.</p>		 <p>2003</p>



How does Central Park School for Children work toward desegregation and integration?

Central Park School for Children (CPSC) is a K–8 public charter school. It is the first project-based learning school in North Carolina, and its pedagogy is designed to center student voice and choice.²³ Staff are trained to create a welcoming, culturally inclusive environment where all parts of a student’s identity are valued and respected. CPSC leadership continually work to engage the school community (e.g., staff, students, family members, board members, and community members) as they move the school’s desegregation and integration initiatives forward.

In terms of student enrollment, CPSC was the first “diverse-by-design” public charter school in the southern United States, meaning that it uses targeted outreach and recruitment strategies to ensure that the student population reflects the race/ethnicity and socioeconomic characteristics of the surrounding community.

¹ CPSC leaders provided the school’s 2023-2024 enrollment data as of January 22, 2024.

² Read about CPSC’s learning approach by visiting its website: <https://cpsfc.org/educational-program/our-approach/>.

³ Project-based learning is also associated with increased student academic success. See, e.g., Chen, C.-H., & Yang, Y.-C. 2019, February. Revisiting the effects of project-based learning on students’ academic achievement: A meta-analysis investigating moderators. *Education Research Review*, 26, 71–81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.11.001>.

When CPSC was founded in 2003, the student body was 58% White, 35% Black, 4% Hispanic or Latine⁴, 2% Asian, and 1% American Indian / Alaska Native.⁵ Then, in 2013, CPSC leaders analyzed the school's growth over its first decade and found that although student population had almost tripled in size, it was becoming less racially and economically diverse. In the 2012-2013 school year, the CPSC student body was 70% White, 18% Black, 5% Hispanic or Latine, 5% two or more races, and 2% Asian, with only 9% of students whose families qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL).⁶ Some of the contributing factors for CPSC's decrease in diversity over its first ten years include its limited support for Hispanic or Latine students (e.g., language access for families), lack of adequate transportation services for students, and the resonance of the school's mission and messaging with middle-class White families. John Heffernan, who was the director of CPSC in 2013, reflected on this time period and said, *"We realized that we went from an integrated school [to] a school that was a vehicle for White flight and for socioeconomic segregation. We also recognized that we were not providing [our students] the advantage of having the joy of learning, the skillset, and the mindset of a joyful learner within an inclusive and diverse community. Actually, we had created barriers that didn't allow us to really fulfill our purpose and mission."*

To address the shift in student demographics, in 2013 the North Carolina State Board of Education granted CPSC the ability to update its weighted lottery admissions system to give priority to students whose families qualified for the National School Lunch Program. CPSC's lottery system was the first in the southern United States to place an advantage for economically disadvantaged students applying to a charter school. See page 1 of this profile for CPSC's student demographics for the 2023-2024 school year.

The school's current weighted lottery system has six priorities^{7,8}, listed below in order:

1. Siblings of currently enrolled students, that is, students whose sibling is enrolled during the year that the lottery is held.
2. Children and grandchildren of CPSC staff and board members.
3. Economic Diversity (within designated walkzone): Students whose families qualify for FRL that live within one mile of the school and qualify for the National School Lunch Program.
4. Economic Diversity: Students whose families qualify based on current income level for the National School Lunch Program.
5. Opportunity: Former students whose family had enrolled at CPSC within the last two academic years but left due to an academic study abroad program, competitive admission residential program, or vocational opportunities of the parents.

⁴ CPSC uses the term *Latine*, which was created by LGBTQI+ Spanish speakers to refer to a group of people from Latin America. *Latine* uses the letter "e" to illustrate gender inclusivity within existing Spanish pronunciation.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey", 2003-04 v.1a, 2021-22 v.1a.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey", 2012-13 v.2a, 2021-22 v.1a.

⁷ Learn more about CPSC's lottery priorities on its website: <https://cpsfc.org/our-campus/admissions/>. Notably, this webpage does not include information about the CPSC pilot program to expand its weighted lottery system.

⁸ In 2023, the North Carolina state legislature passed a law that allowed CPSC to establish a pilot program to expand its weighted lottery to include factors to assist educationally or economically disadvantaged students, including walk zones, starting in the 2024-2025 school year.

6. General Enrollment

Although economic diversity (priorities three and four) may not directly result in racial/ethnic diversity, it can be easier for schools to generate community buy-in around economic diversity if discussions about race/ethnicity are contentious. Additionally, a 2007 U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling limits school districts’ ability to consider race as part of their school integration policies.⁹ Finally, as CPSC works to increase its socioeconomic diversity, downtown Durham residents are experiencing rising home prices and increased gentrification as well as increased housing instability, which may require CPSC to reconsider priority three in future years.¹⁰



Spotlight on resource expenditure

Recruiting a more diverse student body

CPSC dedicates staffing, training, and funding resources to intentionally recruit students from Black families, Latine families, and families that experience poverty.

Staffing

School leaders are anticipating that the large majority of students applying to CPSC through the updated weighted lottery system for the 2024–25 school year will identify as Latine, so they are assigning specific staff members to share information about the school and build authentic relationships with the Latine community. For example, CPSC has a Latine families advocate who conducts outreach to the Latine community and works with community groups and neighborhood organizations where these families live.

Funding

CPSC is allocating existing school resources to expand its outreach efforts to Latine families. For example, Heffernan, former executive director of CPSC and current executive director of the CPSC Foundation, notes that as part of the school’s effort to recruit Latine families, it plans to appropriate school funds to create bilingual recruitment videos. He says that the goal of these videos is to “elevate the story of the school as well as demystify some myths that exist about charter schools.”

Create an inclusive learning environment

CPSC allocates staffing, training, and fiscal resources to cultivate an inclusive learning environment and support students’ mental health needs.

Staffing

CPSC recognizes that in order for students to have an increased sense of belonging, they need to see themselves reflected in the staff members. The school overhauled its job descriptions to specify that it is looking for people who are part of or have worked with what people who are part of or have

⁹ Potter, Halley. (2017, June 28). A Decade after PICS setback, schools still find ways to integrate.

<https://tcf.org/content/commentary/decade-pics-setback-schools-still-find-ways-integrate/>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/may/12/us-city-desert-palaces-durham-housing-crisis>.

worked with what its leaders refer to as “low wealth” communities. This change has led to an increase in staff racial diversity.

Arlie Harris, interim executive director of CPSC, states that, since she joined the school in 2013, “the school has been a lot more intentional in making sure that the folks hired represent the identity of the students and are able to build authentic relationships with them.” She also notes that the school is actively working to hire more Latine teachers and staff members as a direct response to requests from current student families and to prepare for new Latine students who may apply through the weighted lottery system. Additionally, school leaders reported that approximately 50% of administrators identify as a person of color.

Training

The school partners with two local nonprofit organizations, Village of Wisdom and Immersion for Spanish Language Acquisition–North Carolina (ISLA NC), to provide training to staff on how to create culturally responsive learning environments for all students. Training includes information on topics such as cultural competency, bias, racial equity, inclusivity, and partnership with parents and caregivers. Village of Wisdom, a long-time partner of CPSC, provides tools and resources to help teachers create learning environments to meet the diverse needs of Black and Brown learners. The school began partnering with ISLA NC at the end of the 2022–23 school year. ISLA NC is focused on supporting Latine student learning, specifically promoting language justice and narrowing the academic opportunity gap between Latine students and non-Latine students.

Funding

CPSC recently established the Central Park School for Children Foundation, run by Mr. Heffernan, and is hoping to raise \$20 million to identify, research, support, and scale the most highly effective strategies that advance the school’s learning approach. CPSC’s learning approach integrates six facets around child-centered project work: outdoor learning, integrated arts, diverse-by-design, family partnership, joy of learning, and social-emotional learning. For example, CPSC leaders are hoping to allocate foundation funding to increase the school’s mental health resources, particularly because students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to have adverse childhood experiences that impact education outcomes. However, as of September 2023, the school did not have a full-time social worker. The school has one full-time counselor in each building, seven counseling interns, and one part-time social worker who oversees two social work interns. Ms. Harris said, “*We currently can’t support the needs [of students] without the work of the counselors, social workers, and social work interns.*” Leaders acknowledge that having more full-time mental health professionals who are trained in therapeutic interventions and trauma-informed practices is pivotal to creating a learning environment that is responsive to all student needs, particularly the needs of Black students, Brown students, and students experiencing poverty.



What factors support CPSC's ability to source and allocate resources to advance its desegregation and integration initiatives?

Ms. Harris explained that CPSC's project-based learning approach¹¹ provides a solid foundation for school initiatives designed to recruit a diverse student body and cultivate a culturally responsive learning environment. She said, *"You can't center any kids if you don't know who they are, if you don't know about their language, their race, and their home status. And not just [superficially] know that information, but deeply know it and understand it."* She also explained that since CPSC is a charter school, students and families can leave and choose to go to another school if they do not feel it is a good fit, which provides an additional incentive for the school community to be a positive space for current and prospective students and families.

Thinking about the future, Mr. Heffernan hopes that the CPSC Foundation can expand the school's mission of creating a community where "all children thrive"¹² by partnering with community organizations such as Downtown Durham Inc., an economic development agency, to create economic development strategies that prioritize the education of all students, particularly students from historically marginalized communities, and combat increased gentrification of the downtown area.



What are the challenges that CPSC faces related to allocating existing resources and sourcing new resources?

Mr. Heffernan notes that although CPSC has been successful in acquiring public and private funding to support its initiatives, the school continues to seek additional funding to bolster and sustain these initiatives (e.g., student mental health supports). He believes that CPSC's ability to develop narratives that demonstrate the connection between the funding sources and schoolwide goals and outcomes remains "underdeveloped" and that there is an opportunity for the school to better explain to funders that "this is how [the funding has] helped, this is the outcome, and this is the direction for how we will continue to push forward." Mr. Heffernan hopes that the CPSC Foundation can help develop a "philanthropic narrative" to describe how organizations and individuals have contributed to the school's current and future resource needs.

To make progress on this challenge, Mr. Heffernan recommends using existing research on how specific policies or initiatives have worked to demonstrate their value and generate buy-in among community members. *"Because you're not doing anything that's novel at this point,"* he says. *"[the initiative] may be novel for your community, but you're standing on the work of decades of public schools."* Having a clear vision for the initiatives will also help school leaders partner with their board of directors to identify creative solutions related to resource sourcing and allocation.

¹¹ Read about CPSC's learning approach by visiting its website: <https://cpsfc.org/educational-program/our-approach/>.

¹² Read about CPSC's mission and values by visiting its website: <https://cpsfc.org/educational-program/mission-values/>.



Lessons learned

- To support and enrich the CPSC’s existing programs and operations, the school applies for federal, state, and foundation grants. When writing funding applications, CPSC leaders recommend that schools clearly describe how increasing funding or sourcing more funding for specific initiatives is connected to the overall school vision. Integrating information about evidence-based approaches can also sharpen key messages when seeking funding.
- To help school leaders gather feedback and generate buy-in for new or expanded initiatives, find ways to authentically interact with your school community and provide opportunities for discussion. Ideally, the members of your school community will become champions that help the school implement these initiatives.
- Be transparent with your school community about the resources you have to implement your initiatives as well as the resources you will need to bolster and sustain them. This transparency can help guide conversations about future resource allocation.