Project Title: GCS Virtual Choice Showcase 2022
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Research: The GCS Choice Showcase is an event to feature the district’s 60+ magnet schools and choice options. Before the pandemic, it was the largest event hosted by the district and attracted more than 5,000 visitors each year. In Feb. 2021, we went virtual, but we learned that the virtual option wasn’t idea for schools or for parents. Overall application numbers in 2021 were down 11 percent from 2020.

Analysis/Planning: After much debate we decided to plan a socially distanced in-person event for February 2022, with the option for a weeklong virtual showcase if conditions changed. The in-person event would have booths spaced out in quads of four, so that families in attendance would have some room to spread out if waiting to speak to school representatives. We would restrict booth space to only schools and essential departments, so we could fully spread out within the event space. A school bus and mock lunch line, designed to entertain and engage pre-k and kindergarten students, would be eliminated.

The virtual event would be similar to the previous year, with live information sessions, school videos and fact sheets, each school page housed on a virtual showcase site with a full calendar of events. Following feedback from 2021, we limited the live sessions to two instead of six.

Communication/Implementation: In the days following winter break, COVID-19 surged. The magnet application window opened on January 14 and was to close on Feb. 21. On January 12, we officially cancelled our in-person event, which was to be held on Feb. 2, and pivoted to the virtual showcase, scheduled for Feb. 1-4. We had already started promoting the in-person event through social media, flyers and calendar information on the website. We quickly amped up the marketing campaign with the new information, including sponsored social media ads, English and Spanish language radio, television interviews, newsletters and direct messaging to existing families. We also sent postcards with the event information and a QR code for the showcase site to every family in Guilford County Schools. Magnet schools also used their social media channels to promote their interactive events. We continued using the tagline “GCS = Great Choices for Students” to highlight the plentiful options under the GCS umbrella.

Evaluation: Attendance at the virtual sessions varied but overall seemed significantly higher than in 2021, with some schools having more than 100 visitors per session. The majority, more than 40 percent, had 21-50 attendees per session. Unfortunately, total applications dropped slightly, from 11,696 in 2021 to 10,454 in 2022. The enrollment period was also one week shorter in 2022, which may account for some of the difference. We look forward to returning to an in-person event in 2023.
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February 1–4, 2022
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- Discover what makes these award-winning programs unique!

Application window: Jan. 14 – Feb. 21, 2022
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Online at www.gcsnc.com/magnet

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