



# KIPP ANTIOCH

## Case Study



Tennessee Charter  
School Center

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Established in 2018, KIPP Antioch College Prep Elementary (KACPE) caters to 650 students ranging from Kindergarten to 4th grade in South Nashville. In 2022, KACPE had several notable accomplishments, such as ranking in the top 25% of all schools for English Language Arts (ELA) achievement and in the top 10% for math proficiency among traditionally underserved student groups. Most notably, KACPE scored in the top 5% of all schools in ELA achievement among Multilingual Learners (MLs). This stands out because of the key role that language plays in ELA achievement. What's more, nearly a quarter (24%) of KACPE's students are MLs.

Although roughly 8% of Tennessee's residents speak a language other than English at home, the recent influx of new residents to the state both from the US and abroad means that schools will increasingly need to meet the specific educational needs of MLs. Therefore, understanding how KACPE achieves such results can help all schools better serve this growing student population. This report attempts to shed light on this with the goal of sharing successful practices with other school, district and state leaders. Specifically, this report focuses on the following questions:

1. *What policies and practices has KACPE implemented that help ML students, specifically, excel in ELA?*
2. *What challenges has KACPE leadership faced in pursuit of these goals? How were they overcome?*
3. *How does being a charter school, specifically, KACPE's achieve success?*

To answer these questions, we conducted a single-site case study where we interviewed key staff and leadership. These interviews were analyzed to identify common themes which are presented below:

- **A Culture of Coaching:** KACPE prioritizes a culture of coaching and feedback, evident in its extensive administrative and coaching staff, particularly for ML instruction. Regular feedback is provided to all staff by assigned coaches/mentors. Additionally, staff are given clear performance objectives to ensure that they are focusing on skills that are directly linked to student success.
- **High Quality Instruction:** KAPCE places a strong emphasis on instructional quality, focusing on high-quality tier 1 instruction. This prevents learning gaps from forming or widening. Data plays a central role in this effort, with assessments used to identify and address students' specific learning needs before significant gaps emerge.
- **Community Support:** Parent involvement is a cornerstone of KAPCE's community support, with staff recognizing parents as vital stakeholders. Accommodating the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of KAPCE families is key to this. This includes printing all materials in multiple languages, leveraging community networks, and forming personal relationships between staff and families.
- **Being a Charter is Key:** As a charter school, KAPCE benefits from staffing flexibility, allowing them to employ more support and administrative staff than traditional schools. Additionally, flexible fund allocation enables KAPCE to contract with specialized service providers, enhancing programs like their ML instruction through targeted professional development initiatives.

# INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Charter School Center (TCSC) is committed to identifying and elevating stories of successful charter schools in Tennessee. As part of this commitment, TCSC has started its “Success Stories” initiative with the goal of sharing best practices with education leaders and policymakers. This case study is the second installment of this project and focuses on a sizable and growing population of students in Tennessee: multilingual learners. Multilingual learners, or students whose first language is not English, are a group of students that tend to meet or exceed standards on state assessments at lower rates than their native-speaking peers. In this case study, we examined a school that has achieved extraordinary success with this group of students: KIPP Antioch College Prep Elementary. It is our hope that the results from this study will inspire and equip school leaders and policymakers as they seek out innovative ways to serve students in their communities.

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Although roughly 8% of Tennessee’s residents speak a language other than English at home,<sup>2</sup> the recent influx of new residents to the state both from the US and abroad<sup>3</sup> means that schools will increasingly need to meet the specific educational needs of MLs. Therefore, understanding how KACPE achieves such results can help all schools better serve this growing student population. This report attempts to shed light on this with the goal of sharing successful practices with other school, district and state leaders. Specifically, this report focuses on the following questions:

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To answer these questions, we interviewed several of KACPE’s leadership and staff.<sup>4</sup> These interviews were analyzed to identify common themes. These themes are reported here with supporting quotes and examples.<sup>5</sup> It is our hope that this report will not only highlight the exceptional work being done at KACPE, but that it will inspire and empower others who seek to provide students with similar opportunities.

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1 Tennessee recognizes that several groups of students have historically struggled to achieve academic outcomes at the same levels as their peers. These include Black, Hispanic, and Native American students as well as economically disadvantaged, Multilingual learner, and special education students. This is known as the “super subgroup.” For a student to be considered in the super subgroup, they must be identified as belonging to at least one of the student groups listed above. KACPE’s achievement among traditionally underserved students is calculated for all students in this group.

2 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/TN/PST045222>

3 <https://tnsdc.utk.edu/2022/12/22/big-numbers-tennessees-2022-population-gains-pushed-by-record-domestic-net-migration/#:~:text=In%202022%2C%2081%2C646%20more%20people,those%20gains%20were%20offset%20slightly.>

4 Specifically, we interviewed KACPE’s principal, two instructional coaches, one assistant principal, and one teacher.

5 When reading this report, it is important to remember that we cannot say for certain what is causing the outcomes we observe. That said, the themes we report here were common in our interviews. In addition, most of them make sense or align with the academic research literature on this subject.

# HISTORY

In 2018, KACPE opened in Antioch, TN, with five cohorts of kindergarten students under the leadership of Molly Ramsey. In that first year, KACPE shared a building with another local charter school. KACPE uses a cohort model and has very low student attrition so as each kindergarten cohort graduated, a new one followed ultimately, allowing KACPE to outgrow its first space and move into a building of its own. KACPE follows the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) model that emphasizes the courage to take risks, teamwork, excellence, and growth for both teachers and students. Currently in its fifth year, KACPE serves 650 children in grades K-4.

## POLICIES & PRACTICES

### A CULTURE OF COACHING

**Feedback** is at the core of KACPE's culture. This is reflected in both the overall structure of the school as well as its day-to-day practices. For instance, KACPE has more **administrative and coaching staff** than a typical school. With regard to ML instruction, specifically, there are two assistant principals who oversee six ML-focused interventionists. The assistant principals coach the interventionists in how curriculum and instruction must be adapted to meet the needs of ML learners. The interventionists then use both pull-out and push-in models to deliver instruction to ML students. Such a large support system for teachers and coaches is necessary for two reasons. First, it was difficult to find enough ML-certified classroom teachers. Second, when ML-certified staff were hired, the diverse needs of their mixed (both ML and non-ML) classrooms meant that it was difficult for teachers to incorporate ML-specific strategies to the extent that students needed. In the words of KACPE's principal,

***"I couldn't find enough ML certified teachers to put in every homeroom. And even then, the certified staff struggled to make sure accommodations were in place 100% of the time."***

As a result, it was necessary to put staff in place whose primary role was literacy instruction for ML students. This made it possible for appropriate accommodations to be in place for all students which drove much of KACPE's success with ML students.

With so many coaches, it is no surprise that all staff receive feedback from their immediate supervisor regularly if not daily. This includes assistant principals, coaches, specialists and teachers. KACPE's **culture of feedback** is so integral that it is central in staff member evaluations, which makes key performance indicators (KPIs) clear so that all staff know what is expected of them.

## HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION

According to KAPCE’s principal, “Strong teaching works for everyone!” As a result, there is an emphasis on instructional quality at KAPCE. This begins with a focus on **high-quality tier 1 instruction**.<sup>6</sup> By emphasizing high-quality tier 1 instruction, KAPCE helps ensure that learning gaps do not form and that any existing gaps do not widen.

Beyond KAPCE’s general emphasis on tier 1 instruction, **ML interventionists are coached in several strategies to help ML students learn to read**. In the early grades, this includes a strong emphasis on phonological and phonemic awareness. As students get older, this shifts to decoding, fluency, and comprehension. While these are important strategies for all students, they receive special emphasis in ML instruction. What stands out as a particular need for ML students is **background knowledge**. In other words, students will struggle to understand what they are reading if they are not familiar with the context of what they are reading. This can be particularly challenging for ML students who often come from communities where their experiences may be very different than those reflected in commonly used school texts. To help address this, KAPCE teachers will **devote entire lessons to preparing students with the background knowledge** they will need to understand the content of upcoming units.

Another key feature of KAPCE is their use of data. Data drives everything in teachers’ instruction. This data is used to help teachers identify the specific knowledge and skills that students lack and that may be keeping them from learning. Data at KAPCE comes in many forms. The first is **assessment and screening data**. Students are regularly given assessments to determine whether they are progressing as expected on several academic indicators. If a student is falling behind, these assessments will help teachers target the specific knowledge and skill that will help them get back on track. As most people know, collecting data is not enough.

The data must be analyzed and strategies developed that align with what the data reveal. Consequently, KAPCE teachers have regularly scheduled times to review data and plan accordingly in a team context.

Data also comes to teachers and staff in the form of **formal and informal feedback**. As described above, KAPCE staff receive coaching feedback regularly. In addition to this, KAPCE cultivates a culture of strong parent engagement. If a student is struggling or if a teacher’s lessons are not adequately supporting a student, it is common for parents to be the first to flag the issue and reach out to the school.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

As we described above, **parent involvement** is strong at KAPCE and this is supported by staff’s positive attitudes toward families. As one staff member put it, “Parents are our largest stakeholders. Without them, we don’t have jobs.” Despite the high level of parent involvement, the number of languages spoken by KAPCE families can pose a challenge – especially when parents speak less common languages. To address this, KAPCE **prints all materials in multiple languages**. Additionally, many of KAPCE’s students come from tight-knit cultural communities where bonds and networks outside of school are strong. These include churches and mosques as well as informal networks. Some of KAPCE’s staff have been able to work with these organizations to help connect families with resources that will help their children learn including English classes. **Finally, strong bonds are formed with KAPCE families through on-the-ground recruitment efforts from school leadership**. These have included events at community centers as well as door-to-door recruitment. When families feel a personal connection with school staff, they are more confident to reach out with questions or concerns as well as support teachers and staff.

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<sup>6</sup> Tier 1 instruction constitutes the foundational level of the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework, delivering universal, evidence-based teaching in a general education setting. It employs Universal Design for Learning, differentiated instruction, ongoing assessment, collaborative planning, and research-based practices to meet the diverse needs of all students. This initial layer of support aims to prevent academic challenges and serves as the basis for further intervention if necessary.

# CHALLENGES

Despite KAPCE's success, they have also faced challenges. For instance, the diversity of languages spoken at KAPCE means that communication with parents often requires significant resources. These include having multiple interpreters/translators at school events/conferences and increased costs for printing all documents multiple times. The financial cost for these resources is considerable and often limiting.

Additionally, KAPCE has struggled to recruit enough ML-certified teachers to meet the needs of their student body. School leadership attributes this to the fact that there are simply not enough potential staff with these qualifications in the hiring pool. As a result, this has made complying with state mandates for

instructional time for ML students difficult. Some of this has been offset by the coaching and administrative structure described above, but this is an ongoing challenge as the school continues to grow.

Finally, KAPCE struggles to balance pull-out (i.e., students leave their class and are taught in small groups) and push-in services (i.e., interventionists support ML students in their regular classroom while the classroom teacher teaches). This tension comes from the fact that many students require the intensive support that pull out services provide, but doing so requires that students lose the tier-1 instruction that they would have received in their regular classroom. Despite this tension, KAPCE is moving toward providing more push-in services over pull-out services.

## BENEFITS OF BEING A CHARTER SCHOOL

KAPCE benefits from being a charter in several ways, but two stand out. The first is the flexibility in staffing afforded to charter schools. KAPCE's staffing model requires many more support and administrative staff than a traditional school. This would not be possible in schools where FTEs are determined at the district-level and leadership are not able to adapt their staffing to the needs of their students. KAPCE's coaching staff are integral to their success which would not be possible at a traditional district school.

Second, KAPCE is able to spend their funds flexibly which allows them to contract with special service providers. For instance, KAPCE's principal was able to spend professional development funds to hire a firm that made their ML program more intentional, efficient, and allowed them to improve their compliance with state mandates around ML instruction.



## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Several success stories made popular by the media make it seem like success requires something akin to “magic” and, therefore, is beyond the reach of most schools. While the culture at KAPCE is certainly special, KAPCE operates using the resources available to most public schools. What sets it apart is the school leadership’s willingness to target resources to addressing the issues that are most pressing in the school which is, in turn, facilitated by the charter school model. KAPCE is an example of how the flexibility of a charter school paired with the strategic insight of dedicated leadership and staff can accomplish great things where others often struggle. It is our hope that the lessons learned from KAPCE will inspire and equip similar-minded leaders to ensure that all students in Tennessee receive the education they deserve.