

NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



School Culture

Student Directed – Whole School

Playground for Learning

Implementation Description

Tillery Academy, serving students from kindergarten to third grade, embraces and lives three core values - Courage, Respect, and Spirit of Adventure. As the school leadership began to develop their curriculum plan, including the use of the playground space as an extension of classroom learning, all decisions were rooted in these core values. Recognizing that “play-based learning helps engage elementary students in their education and has cognitive, physical, social, and emotional benefits” (Arrow, 2019), the school worked to provide opportunities for students to develop their spirit of adventure while at play. The playground was a logical place to begin, so utilizing NC ACCESS grant funding the school was able to carefully select and purchase equipment allowing them to create an outdoor space resembling a “ninja warrior” course. As students explore this equipment, they develop balance, climbing skills and coordination, all while having fun. Younger students learn from watching older students try, fail, try again and ultimately succeed at various activities, all the while gaining confidence to practice and master these same behaviors and skills. The modeling and persistence seen on the playground has translated into the classroom, where students are taking more risks and are not as discouraged when they struggle with a concept or new information. Teachers are observing what research shows. Students are gaining confidence and courage as they are learning through play, fostering their ability to problem solve and work in teams (Deruy, 2016) and even aiding in language development which in turn is critical for success in every classroom subject (Stringer, 2018).

About This School

Tillery Charter Academy

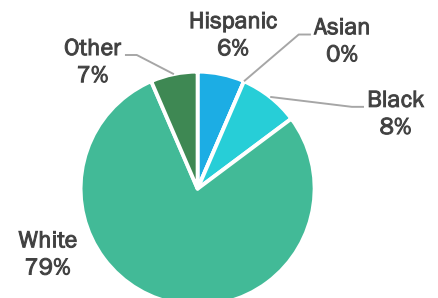
We are a free public school, open to all NC students, offering a classical style of education, a rigorous curriculum, and a focus on our three core values - courage, respect, and the spirit of adventure. Our mission is to provide a rigorous classical education with high academic and personal expectations that inspires students to be productive and thoughtful citizens in their communities and beyond.

Year School Opened: 2019-20

Grant Awarded: 2019-20

Initial Grade Levels Served: K-3

2019-20 Student Demographics



% ED Student Population: xx%

Urbanicity: Rural / Biscoe, NC

Persons in Poverty (Montgomery County)⁴: 16.7%

Results

While test data is not yet available due to COVID's impact on testing plans, school staff provide confirmation, albeit currently anecdotal, that students have demonstrated growth. At the start of the school year, approximately half of the first-grade students were either low performing or had behavior issues. Throughout the school year, these students have become more understanding and accepting of each other, developing mutually beneficial, trusting relationships that allow them to help one another in the classroom.

Challenges

The greatest challenge to implementing this project was shipping delays of the playground equipment due to the impact COVID had on global supply chains. Equipment that was expected at the start of the project's first year did not arrive until several months later, so school began without the promised playground that parents and students expected. In addition to the shipping delays, the school also struggled with the ability to fund additional, desired pieces. Expansion of the playground will become critical as the student population grows and more playground space is required to provide ample space for all students to explore and play. Thinking creatively, the school began a penny wars between classes using all proceeds to fund additional small pieces, such as a water easel and steel drums that align with the school's arts and music focus. Families also were able to donate much needed picnic tables to this space.

Future Modifications

As the school plans for upcoming academic years, they intend to continue adding equipment and expanding the playground. Each piece they add will be connected to one of the three core values, ensuring that the school is doing all it can to teach to the whole child. Also, the playground is another place to teach the importance of character whether you are inside or outside of the classroom.

Critical Components

Getting Started

The purchase of equipment needed to support the school's core values and to ensure that all students have access to age appropriate activities while on the playground was critical and made possible by NC ACCESS grant funding.

Ongoing Supports

As the school grows and expands its grade levels served, there is a need to secure funds to continue expanding the playground area, adding age appropriate pieces.

Equity Connections

- Research indicates economically disadvantaged students have limited access to safe and engaging green spaces in which to play (Hoffmann, 2017). Additionally, youth in poverty suffer from poor health more frequently than their same age peers (Gupta 2007). Illnesses and health concerns impact a child's education as it affects school attendance and cognitive functioning

(US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Data supports what educators and families know: healthy children are more ready to learn! Meeting the need for adequate physical activity improves academic outcomes for all students, especially those who are most at risk.

- Schools can mitigate risks related to green space inequalities through the intentional use of playgrounds. Best practices in equity incorporate the use of green space and physical activity to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged learners. A well planned green space is more than a playground; it is an instrument to reduce inequalities for a child who may not have a safe place to play elsewhere.

Research

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- 2) Arrow, J. (April 11, 2019) How to Use Play for Learning. Edutopia. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-use-play-learning>
- 3) Deruy, E. (September 13, 2016) Learning Through Play. The Atlantic. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/09/learning-through-play/499703/>
- 4) Gupta, R. P., de Wit, M. L., & McKeown, D. (2007). The Impact of Poverty on the Current and Future Health Status of Children. *Paediatrics & child health*, 12(8), 667–672. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/12.8.667>
- 5) Hoffmann, E., Barros, H., Ribeiro, A. (2017). Socioeconomic Inequalities in Green Space Quality and Accessibility—Evidence from a Southern European City. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14(8), 916. Retrieved from doi:10.3390/ijerph14080916
- 6) Stringer, K. (February 6, 2018) A New Push for Play-Based Learning: Why Districts Say It's Leading to More Engaged Students, Collaborative Classmates ... and Better Grades. T74. Retrieved from <https://www.the74million.org/article/a-new-push-for-play-based-learning-why-districts-say-its-leading-to-more-engaged-students-collaborative-classmates-and-better-grades/>
- 7) US Department of Health and Human Services (2010). The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf