

NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



Office of Charter Schools
NC ACCESS PROGRAM
NC Department of Public Instruction

School Culture

Social Emotional Learning

Let's Go On An Adventure

Implementation Description

Located in Boone, NC, Two Rivers Community School (TRCS) emphasizes environmental stewardship and an appreciation of the great outdoors. TRCS is based on an Expeditionary Learning model, in which learning is integrated across multiple disciplines and includes field work and service. In a typical school year, outdoor education and opportunities for excursions are offered year-round, including the Mountain Adventure Program, gardening, overnight camping, canoeing, and skiing. Two Rivers had planned to utilize available NC ACCESS funding to develop a large group enrichment program with their longtime community partner the Buffalo Cove Outdoor Education Center (BCOEC). Due to safety guidelines related to COVID-19, these plans were no longer possible, and the school had to discover a new way to continue their partnership with BCOEC.

School leadership altered their original plans and developed the Monday Adventure Group. This group consisted of 12 educationally disadvantaged students in 5th-8th grade who participated in weekly all-day nature excursions with Buffalo Cove staff. This program took place for 9 weeks in the fall, while students were learning virtually due to social distancing guidelines. Students met at school, and the school provided transportation from the school to various sites for outdoor adventures. The students were selected based on need, ranging from students with low socioeconomic status or an Individualized Learning Program (IEP). School leadership felt that these were the students who had been impacted the most from the isolating COVID-19 shutdowns and would likely benefit the most from the soft skills gained through the interactions while on the excursions. Studies have shown that spending time outdoors leads to a bevy of positive mental health outcomes in children and adults

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About This School

Two Rivers Community School

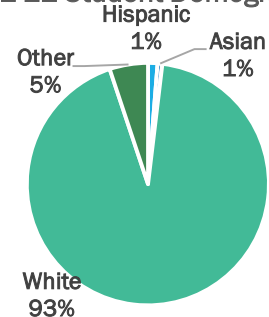
Two Rivers is a close-knit community of students, teachers, and families committed to learning in an environment that values the shared contributions of all. We recognize our responsibility to contribute positively to a larger purpose in our surrounding community and beyond. Two Rivers emphasizes an appreciation for the environment through environmental stewardship and enjoyment of the natural world and is based on an expeditionary learning model in which learning is integrated across multiple disciplines and includes field work and service. We value the role of expeditions in understanding the complexities of real-world success and are committed to providing a supportive learning environment to facilitate self-driven discipline in students.

Year School Opened: 2005-06

Grant Awarded: 2020-21

Initial Grade Levels Served: K-8

2021-22 Student Demographics



% ED Student Population: 47.1%

Urbanicity: Rural / Boone, NC

Persons in Poverty (Watauga County)⁵: 21.8%



including reduced stress, improved creativity, and heightened confidence (Cohen, N.d.). And in a 2019 study of children who participated in outdoor activities, 79% claimed that they experienced improved relationships with classmates, 81% experienced better relationships with teachers, and 84% said they now felt “*capable of doing new things*” (Walker, 2019). While with Buffalo Cove staff, students participated in activities and lesson plans collaboratively designed by the BCOEC director and TRCS’ own Exceptional Children teacher. Students engaged in nature-oriented

activities including hiking, reading poetry, canoeing, and reflective writing. Because the Monday Adventure Group was small and consistent, students had a greater ability to grow in supportive, confidence-building relationships. Consistency is a primary ingredient in creating a safe environment for students, particularly students who regularly experience trauma (TREP Project, N.d.).

Results

Students who participated in the Monday Adventure Group reported stronger bonds with classmates and increased confidence during their time in the outdoors. They were more engaged in school showing increased attendance and improved assignment completion.

Challenges

School leadership faced the obstacle of COVID-19 safety guidelines nullifying their original plans for a school-wide outdoor enrichment program, which would have involved large groups visiting BCOEC twice in an academic year. However, the small, consistent Monday Adventure Group, which began as a back-up plan, provided the opportunity for deeper and more meaningful relationships to form between the students over an extended period of time.

Future Modifications

Once-a-week outdoor excursions are not likely to continue as students return to learning in a school building. However, the success of the Monday Adventure Group has influenced plans for 2021-22 as Two Rivers plans to schedule more frequent trips to Buffalo Cove for smaller groups of students by focusing on 5th through 8th grade students.

Critical Components

Getting Started

TRCS commented that their existing partnership with BCOEC was essential to the success of this program. Additionally, the collaboration between the school’s EC teacher and BCOEC’s director in developing the curriculum was important to provide structure to the Monday Adventure Group.

Ongoing Supports

The directors at both TRCS and BCOEC found that participants in the Monday Adventure Group were successful, because they spent time with the same, small group of classmates over time. The school

plans to integrate this level of consistency in their partnership with BCOEC moving forward in order to increase positive outcomes for students.

Equity Connections

According to research, “*low income and minority communities have less access to the outdoors*” (Fitzner, 2019) and could face economic barriers to entry for certain nature-oriented activities that have associated costs, such as equipment rental fees. TRCS used their annual budget and supplemental NC ACCESS funding to provide excursions to disadvantaged students, who otherwise may not have access to such experiences. These experiences helped grow peer relationships, build confidence, and expand background knowledge for future learning.

Research

1. Cohen, D. (N.d.). “Why Kids Need to Spend Time in Nature”. Child Mind. Accessed June 15, 2021. Retrieved from <https://childmind.org/article/why-kids-need-to-spend-time-in-nature/>
2. Fitzner, Z. (August 8, 2019). “New efforts help engage disadvantaged youth in the outdoors”. Earth.com News. Accessed June 14, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.earth.com/news/engage-disadvantaged-youth-outdoors/>
3. TREP Project. (N.d.) “Consistency And Predictability”. Accessed June 15, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.trepeducator.org/consistency-and-predictability>
4. Walker, R. (November 7, 2019). “Spending time in nature can improve children’s confidence”. University College London. Accessed on June 15, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2019/nov/spending-time-nature-can-improve-childrens-confidence>
5. United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts North Carolina, Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045219>