
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

Paramount School of Excellence (Paramount Brookside)
Paramount Schools of Excellence
Indianapolis, IN

Transcript: Learning from the World Around Them

Narrator: At Paramount Brookside, educators extend their lessons through a variety of school features, including a farm, an Eco center, and a time and space discovery center. Students see how their learning in the classroom connects to the world around them. Chris Larson, environmental education director, explains how the school farm brings lessons to life.

Chris Larson, Environmental Education Director: Environmental Education was written into the original charter when the school was opened in the interest of bringing concepts that fall within environmentalism and agriculture to the near east side of Indianapolis. So the intention was to create a program that really opened up opportunity and access for this community by providing a space where we could grow food where we could keep some animals and have a few of those kind of basic concepts in place where students would see them through specifically designed lessons that are created by the classroom teachers.

Today we had a group of students come out for a math lesson where they were measuring perimeter and Computing area for some of the facilities we have here in our community greenhouse. And so they measured garden beds, our raised beds to figure out the dimensions for planting space or soil volume.

Narrator: Teachers also use the school's onsite time and space discovery center to extend their lessons across content areas and inspire student excitement.

Megan Bouckley, 4th Grade Teacher: So one lesson that we did so far this year we worked with in our time and space room and we had already been talking about the planets and we've been talking about kind of all of all of the celestial bodies and all that sort of things. One of the other things that we've been working on is looking at long division and it was a big struggle for our kids. So we looked at distances between planets and how we could use division to help talk about those things. The kids got really excited about it because it was related to planets and they always loved science but being able to tie it into that math curriculum makes it a lot more fun for them. So it's not just something where they're going and having a great time, but it's specifically correlated to what we're working on in class.

Narrator: School features like the Farm and Discovery center enrich teachers' lessons, but they aren't the focus at Paramount Brookside. Educators here prioritize high-quality instruction and make sure that students can articulate their own learning.

Kensi Sauley, 2nd Grade Teacher: I would say the mission and the vision of Paramount is to ensure quality education to every student in the city. We want to ensure that every student, regardless of their background are able to succeed and have the best academic support available.

Scott Frye, School Principal: An imperative piece to great instruction here is that students can articulate and explain the concept that was taught. There's a couple of things that I would do as an evaluator one is I'm point-blank asking the student as I'm walking around. Hey, what concept are you learning? Tell me a little bit about what you're learning.

Lazarus, 5th Grade Student: You saw me working on in Ms. Wehmeier's class, we were doing graphic sources and like we had to write summaries and what kind of graphic sources there are in the story. Graphic resources are like highlighted bold print heading and maps and labels. They help me understand the text so like on for a map it helps me visualize the like what the setting is or like labels the labels points are like what object and like what that thing is.

Nicole Wehmeier, 5th Grade Teacher: So we want our students to articulate their learning because to us, that's the meat and potatoes if they can tell us what they're learning then they can explain what that means it not only is it tell me the concept it's tell me what that concept means and how you use that in your everyday life. So we put that in our lesson plans

Narrator: Paramount Brookside's school leaders are committed to listening to teachers and supporting their needs.

Scott Frye: I can tell you unequivocally the most important thing for children is great teachers. So growing great teachers and retaining great teachers is what makes a school effective.

Keith Thomas, Middle School Teacher: What has helped us become better teachers is this culture of accountability. Today we're having a data meeting after school and we have those regularly just to make sure that teachers own their data and are aware of it and do whatever we can to make sure that we reach our goals that we set for the school. So administration has always been very supportive. If I go to the principal and say hey, I need this to help students learn to help students become better students, we have it like that.

Nicole Wehmeier: We're constantly looking at our data, we're constantly having meetings with Administration and making changes as we go. One thing I really appreciate about the school is they don't wait until the next year to make a change the minute we see something is not working, we have a meeting and that communication goes out to everyone and the change starts that day.

Scott Frye: I think it's important for regardless of where a school is if they're looking at a National Blue-Ribbon award and saying what really makes an effective school, I think starts with high expectations: high expectations academically and behaviorally. I think it also involves not making excuses regardless of where a school is whether it's in the urban core what kind of school or students or population that you're serving that that doesn't matter. What matters is that you're saying we're going to put our students in a position to be successful and not make excuses.