



## Opening Horizons for Indy Kids

July 9, 2022 by Educator Barnes

One day, our neighbor told us about a virtual fundraiser her job was having to raise money for kids. My husband, kids, and I walked over. The grown-ups participated in the virtual fundraiser on Zoom which also included a trivia game. The kids had fun with each other. To make the

evening feel like the event was in-person, they kept as many of the components as possible which included a spotlight on a program called Horizons, a recipient of donors' funds.

Last week, when I was invited to attend a breakfast and tour the Horizons program, I accepted because I wanted to see the program in action. I wanted to know if the nicely crafted video clip of the program during the fundraiser lived up to the hype. Based on what I saw and learned, I believe it does.

Horizons is a six-week summer program that is housed at St. Richard's Episcopal School. The program focuses on both academics and activities to enrich students' experiences. It is open to students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. The program is free to students. Through its programming, the aim is to prevent summer learning loss and to close the achievement gap. Students who participate in the programming improve in school attendance, math achievement, and academic self-competence.

A strong component of the program was its partnership with other organizations. Although the program is housed at St. Richard's, students frequently leave the campus for experiences. They go swimming at the JCC. It is not only about fun. Students are learning how to swim which is important as many of the students are Black. Black people have been systematically denied access to swimming facilities in the past. When Black parents and grandparents never learned how to swim, it creates a barrier for the youngest Black generation to learn how to swim. What is even more impactful is that one of Horizon's staff members does not know how to swim, and he is learning with his students.

They spend time at Butler University. They took a field trip to the Indiana State Museum where students were able to spend time at the new Major Taylor exhibit. One of the staff members who attended school in Indianapolis as a kid had never been to the museum, and it was his first visit. Children having the opportunity to learn with adults is powerful.

Additionally, students went to the Driving Wind Berry Farm. They also had the opportunity to work with the Asante Children's Theatre. These are only a few of the opportunities the students had.

Teachers are passionate about the program that has been in existence since 1996. Many teachers have taught in the program for several years. A preschool teacher explained to tour participants how she implements the curriculum she has planned, and she includes student-

driven learning. The student-driven learning led to children making art on a mirror which she shared that her students really enjoyed.

We also were able to observe learning in action. Students in one room were in three groups and each group had an instructor. Although it seemed like students were involved in intense instruction, they were smiling and seemed to be having fun.

The program has two literacy coaches and two math coaches. There are also school counselors that work with students. This well-rounded program has had an impact. Based on a recent survey, 100% of parents reported they wanted their children to attend next year.

With the impact of the pandemic, it is important to lift up programming that can have a positive impact on students and their outcomes when they return to school.



May 2016 - The Very Hungry Caterpillar Play at Saint Monica Catholic School

He asked his preschool teacher if they could do a play. Instead of the teacher scoffing at the idea, she thought about how to make it happen. You might think they would have done a simple play one day in class, but they didn't. It ended up being a play for parents to attend. They acted out Eric Carle's book "The Very Hungry Caterpillar." Guess which character my son was? He was the caterpillar, so he was in every scene of the play. When students have the agency to make suggestions and the teacher finds a way to make it happen, it builds stronger

relationships between the students and teacher. Additionally, it helps students learn on a deeper level.

Teachers should not fear a class getting out of hand because they are implementing an idea from a student. They may find themselves trying to implement more than one idea at the same time ... which is why teachers need a good handle on directing their classroom like a symphony.

Teachers, put out a suggestion jar, and let students take the wheel and help drive their own education.