ADVANCING EQUITY AND IMPACT THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOL

NAIS THE INNOVATION KITCHEN

The Children's School
Nurture the Amazing

HISTORY

Since our founding in 1970, **THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOL (TCS)** has honored children and childhood. Founder Lila Bost McDill initially envisioned opening a laboratory school where she could train teachers and observe how children learned. Beginning with one other teacher, a handful of children, and a donated church classroom, she pulled together a community of children, parents, and teachers who formed the foundations of what we see today.

When the school moved to its current location on 10th Street in the spring of 1973, Midtown Atlanta was an eclectic, transitional, and affordable neighborhood. Its central location also made it accessible to children from all parts of Atlanta. From the beginning, McDill was determined that the school would serve not only one part of the city—the predominantly white north side or the predominantly black south side—but that it would be open to "all elementary children whose emotional and intellectual endowment will enable them to work within this group—regardless of race, ethnic, or religious background."

"Think about it: Would you rather learn about something sitting down from a book or lecture, or would you rather learn about it by going there and seeing it firsthand?"

JEFFREY HALLETT, TCS SEVENTH GRADER

"Even as an independent school, we have a public responsibility to all families of young children. TCS is stepping up to help parents create the kind of community, city, and country where we can raise children who are confident, self-aware, and self-assured citizens who celebrate their authentic selves."

NISHANT MEHTA, HEAD OF SCHOOL

IDEAS

REIMAGINING MIDDLE GRADES

➤ As part of its 2016 comprehensive strategic plan, the board endorsed the community's decision to extend the school's endpoint from sixth to eighth grade. Tasked with creating this middle grades program, leadership asked faculty, "If you had a blank slate, no preconceptions, no predetermined curriculum, no expectations for schedule or structure, and were simply asked 'what is an ideal learning environment for this age,' what would you design?"

➤ The design team of teachers and administrators agreed that an ideal program would focus on social impact, and it articulated the framework of engagement, empathy, and equity, within an approach of social entrepreneurship. By engaging with communities and issues outside of school walls, students develop empathy for those who have lived different stories. This empathy fuels a drive toward equity, and an entrepreneurial approach gives structure and sustainability to solutions.

➤ The program is entirely project-oriented, with subjects such as social studies and science used as lenses to unpack and understand real-world community problems. Students then want to urgently learn the subjects, since they solve an immediate need. This structure flips the script from classes in which projects might be done, to community-engaged projects in which subjects are useful, relevant, and timely in helping students understand their world.

IMPLEMENTATION

DOS:

➤ Alignment, intentionality, discipline and, support from the head of school down

➤ Choose the right team—both administrative leadership and faculty

➤ Break down silos across time, space, and personnel

➤ Start with a well-resourced pilot

➤ Release time for project design and reflection for full team during the school day

IMPERATIVE

➤ Inequity

➤ Reimagine what a "middle grade" experience is and embrace childhood throughout the middle years

➤ Capitalize on a start-up opportunity in a 50-year-old institution

RESOURCES

WEBSITE
www.tcsatl.org

FACEBOOK
facebook.com/thechildrensschool

TWITTER
twitter.com/tcs_atlanta

INSTAGRAM
instagram.com/thechildrensschool