

# LITTLE EXPLORER PROGRAM

## CAPE FEAR ACADEMY



In the Little Explorer program at Cape Fear Academy, children are invited to investigate, plan, and collaborate with a sense of adventure as we provide new challenges and new territory to explore. The program provides children with just the right combination of nurturing, structure, and independence. Daily experiences provide for maximum cognitive, social, and emotional growth set in a warm and loving environment. Well-chosen tools and guided experiences allow children to pose and solve problems, thus being active participants in their own learning process.

## PHILOSOPHY

The Little Explorer program encourages children's burgeoning curiosity and promotes a love of learning. The program was been designed to provide scaffolded learning; this means that students are provided with **the exact appropriate challenge** or support in any given subject at any given time regardless of their numeric age. Using this approach, cognitive development and social growth happen when each student's own developmental readiness is coupled with meaningful concrete experience. Students are given daily opportunities to speak with and in front of others, share ideas and answer questions. These experiences advance students' thought-processes and build confidence.

In a warm, nurturing environment, students are supported as they build **the fundamental character traits** that will last a lifetime including kindness, respect and good citizenship. They practice taking turns, listening, and participating comfortably in various social settings. They form a community as they share ideas and discuss classroom projects.

## LITTLE EXPLORERS' MULTI-AGE SETTING

This PK3-5 setting gives children a chance to discover, practice and revisit concepts both as novices in their first year in the classroom and as mentors during their second. Younger students are inspired to take **intellectual risks** as they observe their older classmates. Older students **develop confidence** as they are challenged to guide and support their younger peers by modeling their thinking skills and actions. Academic skill building is adapted to the needs of the full-range of learners in the class through **small group or individual instruction**.

In Little Explorers, children ideally spend two years with the same teachers, providing a sense of continuity and predictability that support them in taking academic risks. This allows teachers to get to know students and their families very well. Adapting the curriculum to the needs and interests of each student with attention to individual developmental readiness is greatly enhanced using this two-year process. In time, a **close-knit "school family"** develops.



The program is structured to allow three, four, and five year olds to enroll for either one or two years depending on age and developmental readiness. Students are **grouped in a variety of configurations** to enjoy lesson plans formulated to suit their developmental stage and to provide appropriate challenges.

## EARLY DISMISSAL OPTION

The Little Explorer program runs Monday through Friday from 8:10 AM - 2:45 PM with an Early Dismissal option of 12:00 PM. If you are unsure which option might best suit your child, teachers are happy to meet and discuss the possibilities with you.

## TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

Our Kindergarten Program provides the best in cognitive and social experiences in order to prepare students more completely for their Lower School academic life. Children continue to be grouped by developmental readiness within the peer group with whom they will go forward. Expertly designed centers and lessons provide rich academic challenges that engage and inspire students. Students are encouraged to be problem-solvers and active learners who express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings with ease.



## CURRICULUM

### Character Development:

Cape Fear Academy's core values are **integrity, respect, resilience, and accountability**. Daily, lower school students **prove their character** through their interactions with their teachers and classmates. They **show pride** in their successes and in the successes of their peers; they **collaborate** to overcome obstacles and achieve goals; they **communicate effectively** with one another; they **deliver on their commitments**; they **contribute** to the life of our school community.

**Classroom Management** is a **uniform approach implemented** in all lower school grades to help maintain consistency for behavioral expectations. Students know our actions are dictated by the following guidelines: 1. *Be respectful.* 2. *Make smart choices.* 3. *Be a great friend.* Positive redirection is given in the form of mystery motivators, a system in which all students work together to earn student-generated rewards.

### Reading & Writing:

**Developmentally-based reading groups** meet daily for instruction using the **Orton-Gillingham method**. This systematic, multi-sensory approach is highly effective in achieving early literacy by recognizing and embracing the interconnectedness of reading, writing, handwriting and spelling.

### Each child reads alone with his or her teacher daily.

Reading materials are chosen to meet individual needs and provide age-appropriate reinforcement and challenges as needed. Through multisensory activities, children develop critical phonemic awareness skills leading to the understanding of the sound/symbol (letter) connection and their relationship to words. Students learn to identify every letter and its



corresponding sound. They brainstorm words, identify word families and begin to learn spelling patterns and rules. These materials are shared with parents to create a strong home-school connection.



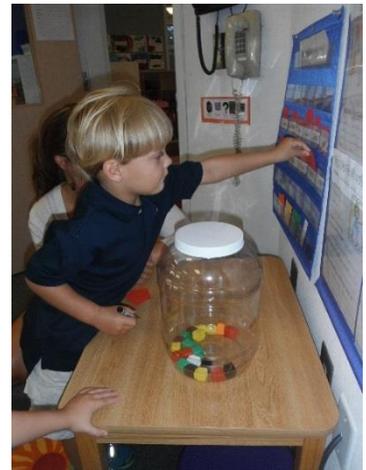
In small and whole group, writing in the form of poems, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, song lyrics and story books are embraced and shared each day. We strive to instill **a sense of wonder where words are concerned**. Creating a unified interest in language and words through playful poems, songs and stories encourages curiosity and excitement about reading.

Students keep journals in which they record their **thoughts, stories, and dreams** and illustrate with colorful pictures. The journals build self-confidence and self-esteem as the children grow comfortable expressing themselves. Stories are routinely dictated to teachers or parent volunteers. The children's early handwriting abilities do not limit them from formulating complex and wonderful real and imaginary stories. The children's stories are shared with the group and celebrated upon being "published." The *Handwriting Without Tears (HWT)* program and its many tools are used to practice correct letter formation. HWT's Sentence School is used as an introduction to language arts.

Writing is taught using the world-renowned **Columbia University Writer's Workshop**. "The mission of the Reading and Writing Project is to help young people become avid and skilled readers, writers, and inquirers" ([readingandwritingproject.com](http://readingandwritingproject.com)). Though at a young age, children have yet to develop the physical ability to construct sentences on paper, they are encouraged to be imaginative story-tellers. Their dictated words are recorded, illustrated, shared, and celebrated.

### **Mathematics:**

Our math program has been designed to be hands-on and meaningful. Students experience daily exploration with varied math tools. Regular introduction of new mathematical concepts and modeling of **problem solving skills** are followed by opportunities for experiential learning and practice. Mathematical thinking and exploration are woven into the fabric of our day. Our innovative block building program allows children to pose and solve mathematical problems while exercising their creativity and working together.



**Real-world experiences** are highlighted as effective ways to practice and understand number concepts. Examples of this include the distribution of objects such as snack plates or tallying results in a classroom vote. Children are encouraged to put objects, events and actions into all kinds of relationships. When children are asked to think about number and quantities of things that are meaningful to them, they can then quantify objects logically and compare sets.

### **Block Program:**

In purposeful block play, children are constantly **investigating, planning, and collaborating**. Block play is active; it builds strong fine and gross motor work and stimulates eye/hand/body coordination. Block play provides opportunities for expansive mathematical and scientific thinking while encouraging vocabulary growth and communication skills. It also allows for rich dramatic play that supports social and emotional development.



### **Social Studies:**

Special projects follow the children's growing interests, need for **exploration**, and **curiosity** about the world around them. Our year-long *How Things Work* project in Little Explorers connects students to the community around them, while our heritage study encourages children to develop a larger world view. The overall social studies theme remains the same, but runs on a two-year loop. For instance, in studying *How Things Work*, children could investigate the behind-the-scenes workings of the local library, post office, and bank one year, then the fire station, bakery, and aquarium the next. Our **many field trips** encourage the children to observe the world around them and make meaningful connections.

### **Science:**

Topics of study each year are selected because they are within children's reach and readily available outside our door. In Little Explorers, this includes learning about the seasons, birds, trees, plants, and the basic life cycle of animals such as caterpillars and frogs. Indoors, topics are selected that relate to work we are doing. Examples include **exploration** with magnets, **construction** of simple balances and ramps, and **experimentation** with color mixing. Discussion of the environment, recycling, and conservation of materials is an on-going topic and objective.

**Technology** is available in the form of a classroom SMART board and access to iPads. Technology is used when and if it is the "best practice" for introducing and/or reinforcing concepts in any given subject of study.



### **Innovative Specials Classes:**

- Music
- Spanish
- Physical Education
- Future Minds Lab
- Guidance
- Media Center
- Art

### **FACILITIES**

The Little Explorer and Kindergarten programs are housed in **the Primary Building on the main Cape Fear Academy campus**. The modern building is situated centrally and is steps from the new Fine Arts Center and Gymnasium. The Lower School building is close by and children have ample opportunities to visit there for lessons in the media center, music room, computer lab, athletic complex, and Future

Minds lab, our amazing technology hub. The Primary Building is also home to two kindergarten classes. It is a safe and happy haven nestled within the larger CFA world.

**Classrooms** are large and carefully designed for center-based learning. Meeting areas are clearly defined by colorful carpets and are home to the classroom SMART Boards. Meeting rugs are bordered by expansive and user-friendly classroom libraries which house a rotating selection of books reflective of our classroom activities, seasons, and the interests of the children.

**Block Areas** are expansive enough to allow multiple children to build safely and in large scale. Blocks are stored in an organized fashion that promotes respect for the area and the materials. Since block areas are located in corners of rooms, block structures can, when appropriate, stand and be added to over the course of the week allowing complex building and collaboration.

**Dramatic Play areas** contain a full selection of play furniture that can be used in varied ways. The table, chairs, sink, refrigerator, oven, and baby bed welcome animated replication of family life. A colorful, life-sized wooden puppet theatre can be transformed into other venues as needed to meet the children's evolving interests and course of study.

Tiled **kitchen areas** serve multiple purposes. They are the perfect spot for artistic endeavors, science experiments or cooking preparation. Items such as a sand table, water table, and art easel are rotated to allow for a wide variety of projects and experiences.

The absence of large teacher desks allows more room for other important items. Multiple tables are perfect spots for hands-on work with materials, centers, team projects, and snack. Several large, carpeted areas are available for work with construction toys and math tools. Modern bathrooms are attached to each classroom and shared only with one neighboring class. The Little Explorers enjoy lunch each day in our dining hall followed by recess and a restful story time before the excitement of afternoon activities.

Outside the classroom doors is a large central space. It is home to the after school program between the hours of 2:45 and 5:30 PM. Before that time, the space is available as needed for projects and activities. A bright and well-designed kitchen is available daily for cooking projects and more.

The Primary Building classes enjoy the exclusive use of **a brand-new play area with a jungle gym, climbing wall, sand box, and toys** chosen specifically for the interests, physical skills, and safety of children between the ages of three and six. This play area is conveniently located steps away from our classroom door.

