

2017 Tot Trot Obstacle Course: Partners for Success & Educates Students with Project Based Learning

Written by Annie Ratke, Fourth Grade Teacher at Peach Plains Elementary

A unique and inspiring relationship has been established between the YMCA's Meredith Long, Child Development Director and Annie Ratke, fourth grade teacher at Peach Plains Elementary. Together they have given students in our community an opportunity to contribute to experiences that will help nurture the YMCA's mission of promoting a healthy mind, body and spirit.

"I desire for our youth to be active, contributing members in Grand Haven. I believe when we engage our students in relevant and meaningful work, we empower them. They crave learning and seek opportunities to be of service for others," said Ratke.

Long approached Ratke last school year and offered her an invitation to have her students design, build and host the Tot Trot. "Meredith knew that I am passionate about Project Based Learning (PBL). She provided us an environment in which our students could work through a creative process and share our solutions with an authentic audience."

Through the OAISD and futurePrep'd, educators like Ratke are providing experiences to learn and implement aspects of design and Project Based Learning. Students were immersed in the Creative Sequence right from the start. The Creative Sequence is a structure that allows students to be thoughtful throughout the entire design process. To launch the project, the fourth graders were visited by Long and Health and Wellness Director, Erica Phelps from the YMCA. Together, they presented the driving question: How might we design and build an obstacle course for the YMCA that promotes a healthy mind, body and spirit?

During the Investigation stage students gained empathy for their audience by meeting with Darcy Dewey, a physical therapist in GHAPS, who presented information on how children move. Students then took an assessment of short scenarios to determine their "Creative DNA" and this placed them into balanced teams to design a course lane for the event. In the Decision stage, students received help from parents, family, friends, even STEM teachers as they designed, constructed and built obstacles and signage for their lane. Students used power tools, paint, spray paint, and traditional craft supplies to make their ideas come to life.

The 2017 Tot Trot Obstacle Course at the Kickoff to Summer Run served as the opportunity for students to present their solutions. Students worked tirelessly on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend to host an event that supported the YMCA's challenge, united families and demonstrated to our community the power and impact of students serving others in relevant, meaningful ways.

"Meredith Long and the YMCA gifted us the opportunity to learn about and experience Project Based Learning as a playful, practical, and impactful approach that can help develop learners who are critical thinkers, flexible, adaptable, and empathetic," said Ratke.

As children lined the course anticipating the start of the 2017 Tot Trot Obstacle Course at the Kickoff to Summer Run, a student turns to her teacher and shares, "Wow Mrs. Ratke, I can't believe we actually made this happen. This has been a really cool experience."