

The Multicultural Advanced Learning Academy

The Multicultural Advanced Learning Academy (MALA) is a school dedicated to giving students a platform to become change agents in their community. MALA will do this through multicultural education and community partnerships. The MALA design combines traditional African, Latin American and Indigenous culture with modern futuristic designs & technology. The school design is also inspired by the natural reserve and river that it is located next to. Our school is unique because it will promote unity in our community and it will be a place where our student's cultures are affirmed through the architecture, school design and curriculum. We hope to become a model for what schools should look like in the future. We want to make schools places where *all* students want to be and learn.

Location

In searching for the perfect location for our school, we asked our group members to think of places that they love in Durham. We wanted it to be a peaceful place that made our students happy. One of our team members suggested the Eno River. After researching the Eno River State Park and taking a trip there, we fell in love and knew that it was the perfect site for our school. Having a connection to the land is important to the cultures of our students. The Eno flows near the urban areas of Durham, North Carolina. It is a hidden gem in our community, with a lot of rich history. The site has a historic mill, mature forests, hiking trails, camping sites and boat access. Many people are surprised to find such a tranquil place so close to an Urban area. Our number one priority when building at this site is to preserve the land and to be a school that is 100% sustainable. We plan to leave the land better than we found it.

Problems We Wanted To Solve

The first thing that we did to design our school was interview community members, teachers and students. From our interviews we found that there were four things that we needed to improve at our school and in our community. The common problems that the people we interviewed identified were (1) Inequitable Schools (2) Students not being engaged (3) Division in our community and (4) Access to healthy food. The solutions that we came up with were to focus on multicultural education, have a cultural center, community engagement and education and urban gardens and bee hives.

Our Team

Our team is made up of students from 2 schools in Durham, North Carolina. Each school brought something unique to the team. Carrington Middle School is a Global Learning Academy and they were our experts for integrating culture into our school. Neal Middle School is a STEM Academy and focused on the school being

technologically advanced and incorporating engineering and agriculture. There are 9 students who are a part of our team and we all worked together and had different roles in creating our school. We learned so much from each other!

Inspiration

Our school design was inspired by the movie Black Panther. Black Panther is a superhero who lives in a futuristic country in Africa. The movie was based on Afro-Futurism which combines traditional African culture and futuristic technology. The inspiration for the architecture of the building came from the geometric shapes in traditional African prints. Lots of circles were incorporated in our design as a representation of unity. We also looked at architecture from African and Latin American countries. The Architecture in those countries incorporates a lot of unique shapes that we don't typically see in the United States. We wanted our building to be a unique structure.

Curriculum

We do not learn in traditional ways. As students, we work in labs and high tech virtual reality spaces. We incorporate culture and social justice into everything that we learn. We work collaboratively and our assignments are all project based. Our cultural center allows us to bring the community into our space and teach them about the cultures of \ our students who are often times marginalized and misunderstood.

Cultural Center

We decided to put a cultural center in our school because we wanted it to be a space where the community could come and learn. This would also be a way for us to learn by teaching our community and be creative by putting together art exhibits and performance art shows for the community that represents who we are. This was especially important for us because most of what we learn at school has nothing to do with our own cultures and many of us are never taught about our heritage in an empowering way.

Tree Houses

We have three tree houses at our school. We thought that if we are going to be in such a beautiful space that we had to make the most of the views around us. The tree houses are spaces for students to get closer to nature and a space that will inspire creativity. We encourage collaborative learning throughout the spaces in our main building, and decided that the treehouses would be for our students to have a space to work independently and to relax in a peaceful environment. Our tree houses allow our students to have a 360 degree aerial view of the river and nature around them.