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Local educator opens free K-12 private school in East Tampa

By Deanne King

TAMPA, Fla. (WFLA) – A long time Tampa Bay educator has opened a free K-12 private school in East Tampa to provide an opportunity outside of public school for families.

Tavis Myrick has been a math teacher for years. He's also the director of the youth mentorship program, Gentlemen's Quest. He also spends time educating incarcerated youth. He's a pillar in the community that has taken it a step further by opening a new private school, Manifestations: School for Innovation & Learning.

Last year, Myrick says parents would come knocking on his door at 2631 East Lake Avenue to see if the building was a school. He started compiling a list of names and contact information. Before the summer, he decided he wanted to open the school to meet the needs of the community.

"Once I saw there was a need, I told my team let's go head first and figure out how we make this happen," Myrick said.

Right now it is a micro school with nearly 40 students and four teachers. Their focus is on meeting the individual needs for each student.

"We wanted to make sure we could open something we could measure and track the growth of our students," he said. "When you look at our classes you'll see mixed grades, but also mixed abilities. Each teacher is working to ensure that they just don't meet grade level, but exceed that. We want our students to be above average."

Myrick said many of the parents were complaining of class sizes, lack of teachers, no personalized instruction, bullying and fighting in public schools. He opened Manifestations to create a different option for parents.

"This is just a different option, we are not trying to compete with our public schools at all," Myrick said. "We want our parents to recognize that public school might be the right fit for certain students, but there are other students that may need something different so that their student can be successful."

The school is tuition-free and offers free uniforms, free catered meals and free educational field trips. It's all possible through the Florida State Scholarship Fund, Step Up for Students.

"We try to ensure they aren't having to pay anything out of pocket," Myrick said.

Nearly all students and staff are minority men and women at Manifestations. Myrick says it has created an atmosphere where everyone feels valued and seen, which makes them excited to learn.

"It means a lot for kids to want to come to school and enjoy learning, especially for minorities because statistically speaking we're the ones not performing at the same level as

some of our counterparts of a different color which is what they call the achievement gap and we are trying to close that," Myrick said.

Manifestations intertwines Christianity into their curriculum. Each day begins with 'Faith Talk' led by the school's Creative Counselor, Monique Perkins.

"We start off the day with them doing faith talk," she said. "We have them doing affirmations and stating positive things they will do that day and for the week."

Perkins also leads creative instruction tailored to each student's aspirations and desires.

"I have kids in my class who aspire to be chefs, dancers, singers, so they have all of these ideas so I get to give them an idea to put it out there, understand it," Perkins said. "I don't want you to be in a box. I want you to express yourself. How you were created is how you were created. Express that in a way that's positive."

Manifestations has had a tremendous impact on fifth grader Jay'lon Byrd.

"This is the only school that got me out of my shell," Byrd said.

Prior to Manifestations, Byrd attended King High School. He said he was shy, stayed to himself and never felt like he belonged.

"It wasn't one on one, but here it's one on one they give you the help that you need," Byrd said.

Byrd also dealt with anxiety and depression prior to manifestations, but with the help of Myrick and his mom, he has now overcome that.

"There were times where Mr. Tavis was like your depression doesn't define who you are, that's in the past," Byrd said. "That really stuck with me. I feel great now, I love who I am."

Byrd aspires to be a professional MMA fighter in the future. He hopes he will serve as an inspiration to his peers.

"You don't have to feel sad, you don't have to worry about it," Byrd said. "I hope I can encourage anyone who feels that way."

Myrick hopes to set a similar example.

Popular Lakeland restaurant shut down due to fire

"I want them to look at me and see I'm an example of what it means to have a dream and see it to fruition and to put feet to your faith and walk it out."

Manifestations opened in August. Myrick wants to keep the school small right now to tailor to the individual needs of their current students, but he hopes to expand. For more information about Manifestations: School for Innovation and Learning, or to help with the initiative, call 813-443-6076.

Watch the video [here](#).