

HEADLINE: How a student's early education experience impacts their future

SUMMARY: Early childhood education plays a major role in a child's development. At Cresset Christian Academy, students are able to build a strong foundation that they can rely on through high school and beyond.

By Abbey Slattery, WRAL Digital Solutions

This article was written for our sponsor, Cresset Christian Academy.

Preschool and kindergarten are crucial in helping children develop emotionally, socially, and intellectually. Not only is brain development at its peak during [early childhood](#), but a strong early education can help reduce learning delays and improve the odds of success later in life.

At Durham's Cresset Christian Academy, students are able to build that strong foundation in preschool — and if they choose to, continue attending and building on that foundation all the way through high school graduation.

"My number-one priority is that all children receive a quality education in a safe, clean, healthy environment so that they are able to develop physically, emotionally, cognitively and also spiritually," said Erika White, director of the preschool program at Cresset Christian Academy. "When parents hand their children off to us, we basically step into the parent role in addition to being their teachers. I want every parent, when they walk away, to know that their kids are safe with us, they are learning to thrive and they're developing."

For White, her role of director encompasses a number of responsibilities. On an educational level, she coaches teachers and acts as a resource to ensure they have everything they need to provide students with a quality education. If they require specialized training, one-on-one development sessions, or help refining their lesson plans, White is able to provide that aid.

When interacting with students, White doesn't want children to only see her when they're in trouble, so she often spends time in the classroom, developing relationships that help students see her as a second parental figure.

"If your child stays at Cresset from preschool through 12th grade, you'll know that they received a biblical foundation, they've been taught life skills, and they've had a continuing level of care that they'll be able to lean on their whole life," said White. "The relationships that the children develop most of the time are lifetime friends, because you'll have a group of students that go through all of school together. And from preschool to high school, we're actively building students who will become productive citizens when they're adults."

For Jamie and Heather Privratsky, the experience their child had in early education at Cresset made them confident in sending the rest of their children through the program and keeping them enrolled at the school long-term.

"All of our kids have individually had their own challenges, but each of them has been able to really grow academically and spiritually. Since the teachers know the kids well, they can give them the extra time they need to work through whatever problems they're having, and to do that with them patiently," said Jamie Privratsky.

"It's a smaller school, so I feel like our children have more opportunities to succeed and a greater variety of activities. Since the pool that you're competing with is a lot smaller, it gives kids opportunities that I

don't think they would be able to have in a larger school — there are just more opportunities to experience things and excel, even at a young age," added Heather Privratsky.

When they started at Cresset, the Privratskys also had foster children and wanted to make sure they're kids could all attend the same school. Cresset was able to accommodate all of the children and meet them at their academic levels.

The smaller class sizes and extra one-on-one time are a major reason why teachers are able to help students build a strong foundation at a young age. Additionally, while Cresset may be smaller than other schools, it doesn't lack diversity.

"It's very academically rigorous and the classes are small, but one of the other aspects of Cresset that I can't stress enough is the diversity," said Jamie. "So many private schools are homogenous, whether it's ethnic backgrounds, racial backgrounds, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Cresset truly is representative in its student body and staff. I feel like our kids are getting a private school education without any of the downsides."

For Heather, after moving around often in her childhood and constantly catching up with new school curriculums, the stability of keeping their children at one school from preschool through graduation was a priority. The smaller size of Cresset helps amplify that stability.

"I'm thankful for my kids to have the benefit of starting at a school and being able to go there through high school. It allows them to develop deep relationships and a sense of belonging. Kids aren't slipping through the cracks — they're known and encouraged, and teachers are going to tell you if something's wrong or not going well," said Heather. "It's important for the kids to learn that they're not just these blobs and it doesn't matter what they do. Here, they know that people care, and they have consistency and balance."

While not all students stick around Cresset through high school, White believes that no matter where they end up continuing their education, they'll be prepared for future success.

"Through an early childhood foundation kids are able to get a head start academically. It just sets them up for the future, and I believe that's what we do here," said White. "Not only do we give them a solid educational foundation, but we also give them life skills. We also regularly go back and evaluate how we're doing, and we strengthen our weaknesses on a daily basis actually. When it's time for our preschoolers to leave, we're confident that they have matured and developed in every area."

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