



## Founded in

2013 (restart)

## Number of Schools, Location(s)

One in the Bronx, New York City, NY

## Number of Students

361

## Number of Teachers / Teacher Retention

Searching for this information

## Per-Pupil Funding

Approximately \$11,900<sup>1</sup>

## Sector

District

## Grades Served

Pre-K3 through 5th

## Student Demographics

33% Black  
66% Hispanic

26% students with disabilities  
21% English learners  
96% eligible for free or reduced lunch

## Teacher Demographics

2% Black  
86% Hispanic  
10% White  
2% Asian

75% Bilingual

<sup>[1]</sup> Derived from data here: NYC Department of Education, "Concourse Village Elementary School: Fiscal Year 2020 Budget," October 18, 2019, [https://www.nycenet.edu/offices/d\\_chanc\\_oper/budget/dbor/galaxy/galaxybudgetsummaryto/default.aspx?DDBSSS\\_INPUT=X359](https://www.nycenet.edu/offices/d_chanc_oper/budget/dbor/galaxy/galaxybudgetsummaryto/default.aspx?DDBSSS_INPUT=X359).

## Anchoring to Established Cognitive Developmental & Educational Theories

### Critical Pedagogy <sup>2</sup>

**Researcher:** Paulo Freire

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Education cannot be divorced from politics. It either serves:

- A. As a mechanism for assimilation into the present mainstream culture, logic, and systems for the purpose of conformity, or
- B. To facilitate awareness of, and liberation from, such mechanisms, as well as awareness of one's sociocultural identity, both within and separate from the mainstream context historically through present times.

The role of education should be the latter, according to this theory.

### Social Learning Theory / Social Cognitive Theory <sup>3</sup>

**Researcher:** Albert Bandura

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Children learn and develop new knowledge and skills through observation and modeling. Individual, Proximal, and Collective Agency serve as mechanisms for shaping children's overall growth and life outcomes.

### Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development — Constructivism<sup>4</sup>

**Researcher:** Jean Piaget

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Children learn as an artifact of factors both internal and external to the child. Children learn best by doing and through engaging in their environment and with the adults and peers around them.

### Sociocultural Theory <sup>5,6</sup>

**Researcher:** Lev Vygotsky

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Children learn through hands-on experiences. Everyone in the child's environment and the overall culture and society are responsible for developing higher order cognitive functions. Learning is inherently a social act. Adults facilitate children's knowledge development through scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development — the space between a child's prior background knowledge and what they can do on their own, and the new knowledge, understandings, or skills that they need support mastering.

### Ecological Systems Theory <sup>7</sup>

**Researcher:** Urie Bronfenbrenner

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Children learn through both internal and external factors by engaging in several environmental or ecological systems:

- Microsystem (*e.g. family, caregivers, school*)
- Mesosystem (*refers to relationships between those within the child's microsystem, such as parent-school partnerships*)
- Exosystem (*refers to larger social systems that impact the child's development, such as community-based resources or parent workplace environments that may cause stress on parents that lead to stress for children*)
- Macrosystem (*refers to cultural values, customs and laws*)
- Chronosystem (*refers to dimensions of time and the interplay between time and a child's external life changes and circumstances as well as the child's internal development and identity*)

## Introduction

"This time will be different. It has to be different," Principal Alexa Sorden affirmed as she prepared to open Concourse Village Elementary School (CVES), a neighborhood school part of NYC's Department of Education (District 07: Bronx). The school exists to serve children in the Concourse neighborhood, which is home to predominantly people of color (roughly 33% African American and 66% Latino), and many families who struggle financially (with roughly 32% of residents living in poverty and a 13% unemployment rate).

By 2013, the Concourse community had endured years of uncertainty regarding its neighborhood elementary school. Leader after leader took the helm of the pre-k through grade 5

<sup>[2]</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).

<sup>[3]</sup> Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory in Cultural Context," *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 51, no. 2 (2002): 269.

<sup>[4]</sup> Jean Piaget, "Piaget's Theory," in: Bärbel Inhelder, Harold H. Chipman, and Charles Zwingmann, eds., *Piaget and His School* (New York: Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, Springer Study Edition, 1976).

<sup>[5]</sup> Lev Vygotsky, "The Development of Higher Psychological Functions," *Russian Social Science Review* 18, no. 3 (1977): 38.

<sup>[6]</sup> James P. Lantolf and Aneta Pavlenko, "Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Acquisition," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 15 (1995): 108-124. doi:10.1017/S0267190500002646.

<sup>[7]</sup> Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Ecological Systems Theory," in Ross Vasta, ed., *Six Theories of Child Development: Revised Formulations and Current Issues* (London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1992), 187-249.

school. A restart followed a restart. And still, the community's children were not supported to thrive in all the ways families want their children to thrive.

In the years prior, Alexa Sorden — an experienced and effective New York City educator from Washington Heights — had tackled similarly challenging situations. In 2012, Sorden was named principal of a middle school in district 4 that was slated to close the following year. It was Sorden's charge to keep the school operational for its final year. Instead, Sorden rewrote the goal: to close the school with dignity and to orient the entire school community's focus on the success of children who still relied on the school for their education. Over the course of its final year, the school not only remained operational and conducted necessary close-out activities, but its students also made gains academically and benefited from the care and concern demonstrated by the adults around them.

As Sorden wound down the school, she was presented with the opportunity to create something new — hence the start of Concourse Village Elementary School (CVES). Sorden entered the X156 Campus in the Melrose section of the Bronx. The X156 campus had experienced two closures in five years due to years of failure and persistently dangerous status.

Sorden applied her student-centric, optimistic perspective to the new challenge ahead: revitalizing the community with Concourse Village Elementary School. With a firm commitment to making this new beginning different from the community's past experiences, Sorden set out to recruit staff — not those intent on "saving" impoverished children, but those who would put in the real work to nurture students and hold them to high expectations and outcomes. Sorden engaged parents — not expecting their immediate buy-in, especially after the years of turmoil they had endured, but instead establishing herself as a stable presence with a clear, compelling vision for what the school might be.

How could she describe the difference that she wanted to foster in the school? Sorden honed in on two ideas. First, students needed to be happy and safe. Children deserve this, and in recent years, the X156 campus had been deemed "persistently dangerous." Sorden knew that happiness and safety are precursors to effective learning. Secondly, students needed to be supported to think critically, to develop their own voices, and to advocate for themselves. Of course, the two concepts are connected. As Sorden said, "We wanted to create a space where children feel safe, nurtured, and loved so that they can tell us what they need and want. If they need us to repeat something, if they don't understand something, they need to know how to ask — and too often our kids don't always advocate for themselves." Thus emerged the Concourse Village Elementary School mission, "to provide a safe and nurturing environment where all students are cognitively stimulated by a rigorous curriculum as well as personally motivated by our core values, which are: Perseverance, Optimism,

Willingness, Empathy, and Respect. Through our core values we will foster confident, well-rounded leaders who grow up to be critical thinkers and socially responsible adults who positively impact the world around them."

CVES staff and students implement this vision through deep commitment to the school's core values, summarized by the fitting acronym IPOWER (integrity, perseverance, optimism, willingness, empathy, and respect). Posters reminding all community members of the core values are everywhere. The meaning of each is explicitly taught, year after year. Students and staff frequently cite the core values, almost as offhand comments, in their day-to-day activity, such as the student who reflected, "I had to be very willing today to do those hard math problems in 90 seconds!" Students are also supported to call to mind the core values — as well as the broader vision and mission of the school — on a daily basis as each class recites the Scholar's Creed of Integrity, an affirmation that weaves in the school's core values. Another student explained the meaning of this creed: "It's a promise to share the core values, and we say it every day. It gets stuck in my head. I know it by memory. It's important that we say it every day, and not just mumbling it. It keeps us on track."

### The Scholar's Creed of Integrity

**I am a Concourse Village scholar, destined for success, educated by the best teachers on earth.**

**I promise to exhibit perseverance, optimism, and willingness because these core values build character.**

**Additionally, I promise to show empathy and respect to my peers, educators, and community at large, as I too require the same.**

**Reflection and self-regulation will keep me focused and on track toward obtaining academic and personal success.**

**Ultimately, my achievements will leave a lasting impression on the world.**

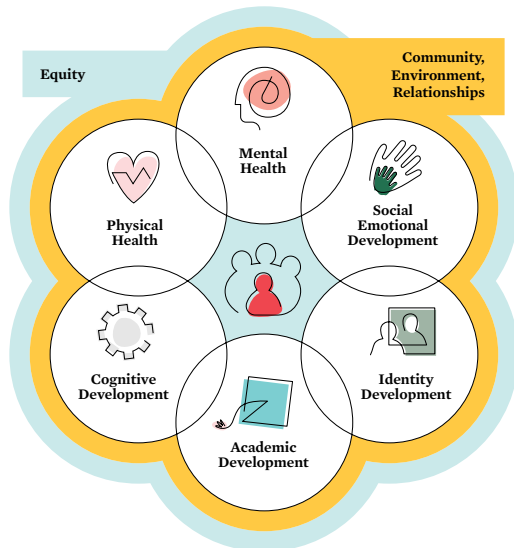


United in their core values, CVES staff and students frequently refer to themselves as a “Community of One,” where the success and wellness of the individual is inseparable from the success and wellness of the whole. The sense of community permeates the CVES environment, from the vibrant, friendly hallways where staff, families, and students connect to the active, rigorous classrooms where students and teachers collaborate. As one staff member said of the culture, “There is a sense of community here starting in the classroom. Kids don’t just sit and do assignments; they’re on a learning journey together. We talk about how as a community of one, our actions affect each other; we’re all in it together. Over time, it gets bigger. My community isn’t just my third-grade classroom, it’s all of third grade, it’s the whole school, it’s my neighborhood ... students develop a sense of belonging to something and know that they have to give something to our community.” A student later added, “We are a community of one here; if someone in your class is talking or not doing the right thing, that’s on the whole class. We all have to reflect on it, especially the person who did the wrong thing.” Still another student shared, “In our classrooms, we’re a community of one — like when we’re doing shared reading, we do that as a community of one first so we all learn the reading.”

come from similar backgrounds, but also students across the city and state overall. As one teacher explained, “We have a big belief that the kids CAN do it. No matter who you are. We all know you have baggage. It’s the South Bronx. It doesn’t mean you’re going to come through the doors and that we have preconceived notions of you. You have the same expectations as everyone else. We need to give students encouragement, help them know that they can do it, let them know we expect to see them every day.” And students are happy in the school that prioritizes their holistic development and well-being — academically and beyond. When asked what one thing he would change about CVES, a fourth-grader earnestly responded, “It should be open all year round.”



**Comprehensive Child Development**



This clear vision for students — as well as robust, coherent systems and structures to enable that vision — has led to tremendous success for Concourse Village Elementary School students. The school serves students (of whom 66% are Latino, 33% are Black, 26% are students with disabilities, 21% are English language learners, and 96% receive free or reduced lunch) from backgrounds and identities that are elsewhere clustered in schools that do not support them to succeed; at CVES, students academically outperform not only those who

**Defining and Measuring Success**

**Definition of student success.** Concourse Village Elementary School holds a broad definition of student success, which it communicates via the mission, core values, and Scholar’s Creed of Integrity shared above. Sorden identified how this definition of success is applicable to students’ experiences at CVES, but also more broadly. “For students to be ready for middle school — and for life — I know that academically I want students reading on or above grade level, writing five solid paragraphs to inform or argue, to use textual evidence to back a claim. In math, they need to be on or above grade level. They need to know their basics. They need to be fluent in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. They also need to understand the core values. These also transfer academically and personally. I want them to believe everything we say in the Scholar’s Creed of Integrity — that they are destined for success and that they got the best education possible — so that they know they are ready for whatever is next and that they, too, can leave a legacy. I want them to know they have choices — college, running a business, going into a trade. I want them to know life outside of the Bronx. I want them to become well-rounded individuals.”

**Current and desired ways of measuring success across domains.** Students and teachers note that there are few existing ways to measure what they’re trying to do with students. The school has piloted some systems for measuring and promoting critical thinking and reflection it seeks to foster; for example, it has self-evaluation rubrics, through which students assess their own work, effort, and process. Additionally, school leaders (including Sorden and an assistant principal, ESL coordinator, science director, and guidance counselor) refer to themselves as the “Running Record Team,” through which they track individual students’ needs and growth year over year.

**Academic success.** Concourse Village Elementary School boasts outstanding academic results.

- The school dramatically outperforms the state and surrounding districts on state standardized tests in math and ELA. In 2018-19, nearly 80% of CVES students met or exceeded expectations, compared to 46% of students across the state and 28.5% in the surrounding districts.
- Specific cohorts at Concourse Village Elementary dramatically outperform their peers across the state: At CVES, 81.5% of Latino students, 70% of Black students, 65.5% of special education students, 78% of English language learners, and 76.5% of low-income students meet or exceed expectations across state assessments; this is compared to 35.5% for Latino students, 33.5% of Black students, 15% of special education students, 13% of English language learner students, and 36.5% of low-income students across the state.
- The school gets formative academic data on a regular basis via a variety of tools and resources it has invested in (Zearn, Khan Academy, Mathletics, Flocabulary, paper-based assessments). The data from the range of these resources is then aggregated, often automatically, in Schoology.



## How Concourse Village Elementary School Facilitates Comprehensive Student Development

Concourse Village Elementary School demonstrates integration across multiple domains of Comprehensive Student Development (CSD). In the sections that follow, we explain what the CVES model looks like. We also clarify how the model fuels CSD.

The following aspects of the CVES model are critical to its success in facilitating student development:

1. Systems to foster a safe and nurturing environment
2. Systems to cognitively stimulate students
3. Investment in adults, who are seen as major influencers of children’s success

### 1. Systems to foster a safe and nurturing environment

Cognitive	Physical	<b>Academic</b>
Mental	<b>Social Emotional</b>	Identity

■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain

Sorden and staff understand how important it is that all children feel safe and loved in order to be able to learn. They also recognize that many of their children encounter challenges and traumas outside of school that may threaten that safety.

Thus, CVES has anchored on a variety of practices that are designed to bring students into a place of safety — and thus a place of learning — when they enter the school. Students are greeted by name at the door before entering classrooms designed to be welcoming, comfortable, and engaging through thematic decor, use of aromatic diffusers, and a variety of kid-friendly seating options. The day then kicks off with a set of routines, including an official greeting, morning meditative breathing exercise, recitation of the Scholar’s Creed of Integrity, a lively dance to each grade’s signature song, and a brief language and literacy lesson, all designed to help children start the day on a strong foot.

Students needing extra support to get to that place of safety, such as a child who is chronically absent or one who is going through tough times at home, are identified by school leaders and support staff during the morning meal time and

provided with additional one-on-one attention before the school day starts.

Throughout the school day, systems for safety and nurture continue as students engage in academic coursework. There are clear roles and responsibilities, from table manager to music director, designed to make classrooms run smoothly and to empower students to own the classroom. Transitions always occur to the same song — the “Mission: Impossible” theme — to infuse some joy (and often some dancing) while signaling that students need to move on to the next activity. Classes throughout the school use the same set of color-coded cards for each student to use to indicate when he or she needs extra help. As one student said, “I like these cards because they help me communicate what I need. When we’re doing work, I put a green card up if I’m fine. A yellow lets me say that I need help. I use a pink when I have no idea what to do and I need help.”

Notably, the systems for creating a safe and nurturing environment are highly consistent within and across grade levels. Sorden said, “Traditionally, teachers have a history of running their classrooms their way. As a classroom teacher, I did that. But here, we aspire to be Starbucks, where no matter where you are, you’re going to get a great latte. Our classrooms need to be designed in that fashion so students get the best system and structure regardless of their grade or teacher. When they transition across classes or grades, they shouldn’t have to relearn the structures. This supports students to be safe and successful. When they know what to predict, they are more at ease and open to learn.”

CVES leaders provide this extra support while also maintaining high expectations. For example, recognizing the unique challenges that neighborhood families face, Sorden noted that while breakfast service starts at 8:05 a.m., class start time is later than other area schools — 8:45 a.m. — thus providing a cushion for families. While offering this support, school leaders are also quick to hold parents accountable for students who are chronically tardy or absent, and a tardy child is sent straight to class. As Sorden explained, “I don’t want tardy students to think they can just have breakfast in the classroom — that’s a sacred learning space. I want the parents and students to know that we have our breakfast time, and if they miss that, they miss that. They need to come earlier the next day.”

The systems CVES uses to create a safe, nurturing environment foster student **social-emotional development** by ensuring that each child has strong attachments to trusted adults, a sense of belonging, and comforting predictability at the school, as well as the tools for stress management. Attention to students’ social-emotional needs then makes it possible for **academic development** to occur. The following examples illustrate the CVES approach to creating a safe, nurturing environment:

- “Good morning, fourth-graders!” “Good morning, Mrs. Nuñez!” chimed a group of 20 CVES students on a recent Friday morning as they stood outside the classroom door. After this cheerful group hello, students were welcomed one by one and given the option to receive a hug, high five, smile or other preferred greeting. Teachers explain the importance of this ritual, through which teachers get a chance to look all students in the eye, make them feel known and seen, and gauge anything that might be going on with them.
- Among the several morning rituals, students particularly highlighted the importance of starting the day BIG by Breathing deeply, Initiating an intention for the day, and Getting ready to have an awesome day. Students are guided through a brief breathing exercise before the busyness of academic learning starts.



- Another morning ritual involves a brief language and literacy lesson, which is designed to reinforce students’ phonics skills, fluency, and vocabulary. A student leader introduces a word — often a complex, multisyllabic one —

and brings the entire class through a ritual of pronouncing, spelling, and using the word in a sentence. This ritual is rooted in the science and best practices of core literacy skill-based instruction, indicating that such skills must be explicitly taught in a multisensory, explicit and systematic fashion.

- Plush seats exist throughout the classroom, and it’s not uncommon to see one group wiggling on a set of bouncy chairs while other students curl up in recliners reading books. Sorden said, “We purchased furniture so that students can pick the area that will work best for their learning.” This norm is grounded in best practices in differentiation and meeting the needs of every learner. These sorts of supports in the classroom allow all children (not just those with special identified needs) to benefit from differentiated resources.
- Like many schools, Concourse Village Elementary School instituted a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system, through which students can earn “iPOWER Dollars” from teachers for exhibiting core value-aligned behavior. iPOWER dollars can then be exchanged for small prizes or treats from the school store. Three years ago, however, staff witnessed a student giving away his iPOWER dollars to a classmate. When asked why, the student said that his classmate was demonstrating Respect, one of the core values, and should be rewarded. Since that experience, CVES has updated its PBIS system to allow for students to recognize and reward each other’s values-aligned behavior with the iPOWER Coupon.

## 2. Systems to cognitively stimulate students

Cognitive	Physical	Academic
Mental	<b>Social Emotional</b>	Identity

■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain

A similarly well-codified and aligned set of systems exists to ensure not only that students are safe and nurtured, but also that they are pushed to think critically and grow cognitively and academically. Concourse Village Elementary School calls this area of focus “cognitive stimulation.”

Cognitive stimulation starts first thing in the morning, where — even as students engage in routines to promote safety and nurture — they are also reengaged in core academic content. Students across grades practice core mathematical and language and literacy skills that are foundational to fluency in these areas.

After morning routines, students engage in academic coursework via the school’s blended learning model, which is designed to target academic learning to the individual’s needs. In this model, students learn in a variety of settings over the course of the day: full group, small group, one-on-one, both with and without the support of technology tools and programs. To enable this model, CVES has invested in a variety of curricular materials and technology tools that facilitate and support student learning in myriad ways. The model permits CVES staff to target teaching and intervention based on students’ unique learning needs, and it creates time and space during the day for teachers to meet with students one-on-one for conferences.

Such a model requires students to be supported to be self-directed in their work. CVES has clear systems to help students build these skills. In every class, students encounter or create maps for how they should use their time. Over the course of a class period, students are prompted to manage their time effectively and, at the end, reflect on what went well versus what they can improve in terms of the academic content as well as the learning process. Students are also equipped with a series of cards to signal their needs: a green indicates a student is comfortable and confident in the learning objectives of the day; a red indicates a student needs support from a teacher or peer.

Classrooms across CVES share not only this model for learning, but also some of the same norms and routines for engaging students in critical thinking. One system, the TAG system, is a structured protocol through which a student shares work with her classmates and then invites others to Tell something they like about the work, Ask a question about the work, or Give constructive feedback about the work.



The systems CVES uses to cognitively stimulate students enable **cognitive development** by giving all students explicit instruction and multiple supports related to executive functions like planning; the nature of the blended learning model

also requires students to build self-regulation skills that enable them to maintain attention on their work, even if they would be tempted to use the time to chat with friends or daydream. The systems also facilitate **social-emotional development** in that they build student self-direction (such as when engaging in independent work), relationship skills (such as when doing the TAG protocol), and agency (as students make choices about their work and advocate for their needs). The systems are also deeply embedded within the CVES model for **academic development**, which is oriented to understanding and responding to each student's learning strengths and needs. The following examples illustrate the CVES approach to cognitively stimulating students:

- Sorden described the school's collaborative reading system, which supports students to build close reading skills while also expanding their understanding of a range of content: "We pick a content area that excites our students — say Mayan civilization — and we go through five phases of reading the text, one phase per day. With this shared foundation, students can then go off and work independently because they're all getting the same prior knowledge and the same refresher of skills."
- In an art classroom, second-grade students completed a process map to get organized for the day. In mapping out their time, they chose from options laid out by their teacher, who used the planning process to introduce key concepts of the lesson — would each student want to create a two-dimensional or three-dimensional piece? The lesson allowed students to choose what media they would use to develop their creation. In mapping out their time, students not only make choices of what they will create and what materials they will use, they also are prompted to set aside time to plan their creation, build it, and refine it. The art teacher shared that this planning helps students build time management skills; "It's amazing how many times a student comes in, I greet her, and she says hello before saying something like 'It is great to see you, but I have to get to work! We only have one class period left to finish our portraits!'"
- One teacher reflected on how the school has built students' time management: "We purchased individual timers and we have conversations about how long things should take. If a child needs more time, we have another conversation. How much time do you need? Why? Were you focused during your work? Distracted? Were you in the space where you'll be most productive? Is next to your best friend the best spot to be?"
- Students in an ELA classroom finished reading a passage about a young girl who volunteers at a pet shelter; they answered several comprehension and critical thinking questions, which required them to make claims and back them up with evidence. Then it was time to play TAG. One student shared her answer to the first question. Colorful cards popped in the air as students were eager to share their feedback. The student who shared her work picked on a classmate, using the language consistent across classrooms: "I acknowledge [name]." The respondent shared, "I think you did a good job citing textual evidence to explain why the passage had the title it did. I heard you use at least two text citations," in an example of Telling her classmate something strong about her response. Another student was then acknowledged, and he shared some advice in an example of Giving constructive feedback: "I think your answer could have been even better if you included more information about why the girl liked working at the animal shelter."
- In a math class, a group of students played an engaging, space-themed, standards-aligned game in a corner to build their fluency with basic addition and subtraction facts. "Yes! I beat it!" exclaimed one student as he cleared the next "level" (indicating a certain level of speed and accuracy in single-digit addition facts).
- Elsewhere in the same classroom, a group of students clustered around a table topped with dry-erase board. The group of students were tackling the challenge math problem of the week, for which they would have to show multiple paths to getting the right answer. In this intentionally designed grouping of students, some who had already mastered the skill were coaching those still learning the skill. "Hey, remember to underline the keywords in the problem that help us know if it's a subtraction or addition problem," one student advised another.
- At the end of the work time, students rushed to grab a self-evaluation rubric from the stack in a corner. "I gave myself a P today, meaning I'm proficient and on my way to expert. Last week, I gave myself an N, because I was still a Novice and I had put in some effort, but not enough," shared one of the group members before jotting down some notes about what he had learned and how the group work had unfolded.





### 3. Investment in adults, who are seen as major influencers of children’s success

Cognitive	Physical	<b>Academic</b>
Mental	<b>Social Emotional</b>	Identity

■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain

As displayed, Concourse Village Elementary School has clear structures and systems that meet all children’s needs. Similarly, CVES has a set of structures and systems in place to support adults in the community. These systems are tailored to the unique needs of each staff member and parent or guardian.

At the heart of the systems and structures for adults at CVES is a belief that adults in the community exist for the well-being and success of the students. Thus, it is important to attend to adults’ needs (so that they can effectively support children); at the same time, it’s important not to elevate adults’ needs over those of children. As one staff member said, “The scholars built this school. We looked at each scholar as a whole person, and we built everything around the scholars — including the things we do as adults.”

This emphasis on child-centric staff requires a thoughtful hiring process. Candidates first respond to a series of standard interview questions via written answers; this frees up their time in the school to be focused on interaction with children and staff. Candidates are expected to deliver sample lessons to children (who then provide input on the hire); they also converse with current staff (who probe to see whether the candidate has the collaborative, child-centric mindsets required). Candidates are encouraged to visit the school multiple times to get to know the community. Sorden and her team are deeply committed to ensuring candidates are a good match.

Once on board, staff receive clear expectations and in-depth training in the school’s structures, which are designed to create the necessary predictability for student safety and success. New staff attend multiweek training sessions throughout the summer to learn the school’s systems and protocols. Because of the strong rationale for these systems, even seasoned educators at the school are expected to maintain a high level of consistency with the environment and practices of other classrooms.

Staff are supported with intensive professional development to grow in their effectiveness as child-centric educators; this professional development is tailored to each educator’s needs. Rather than follow the adult learning scope and sequence as prescribed by the district, the unionized CVES staff received special permission to pursue their own professional develop-

ment path via a format modeled off of the ways students at CVES learn. Thus, at CVES, staff sit down with leaders and colleagues to identify their strengths and areas of need. They then enter two-week-long learning cycles, tailored to their areas of need, through which they learn alongside others who seek to grow in a particular area — be it questioning techniques or classroom management. Over the course of the two-week period, staff engage in a variety of learning activities during the school day and after school: reading research, reviewing exemplary practice, observing each other’s classrooms, practicing new strategies, and giving and receiving feedback. One teacher described the process: “It’s a safe zone and trial and error here ... we’re all trying things out, trying to be the best teachers we can be for our kids.”

Parents and guardians, too, are supported to continuously develop in their roles as primary developers of CVES students. CVES staff make a concerted effort to bring parents along in their students’ learning. For example, staff use Kinvoled, an app to send texts to parents sharing updates about what students are learning and how they can build on classroom activity at home. The same app can be used to check in on a student who is absent for the day or to share a particularly shining story of a student’s academic growth or alignment to the core values.



Parents and guardians needing additional support are provided extra opportunities to engage. CVES hosts various parent and guardian nights tailored to needs expressed or identified among the community’s families. In one example, parents and guardians engaged in a series of workshops designed to teach strategies for stress management, like meditation and breathing. In another example, parents and guardians were invited to bring their children to a reading night focused on “Those Shoes,” a book about a young boy who wants brand-name shoes but whose grandma instead gives him a pair of new winter boots. The reading event enabled school leaders to facilitate conversation among parents and students about how even though families desire to give their children the things

they want, it is often necessary to prioritize needs over wants. Again with this parent engagement, the focus is on creating the best environment for children. As one staff member shared, “Our work with parents is through the lens of ‘How do we help them to reflect and to show love to their child?’ We know parents love their children, but we need to make sure the children are feeling the love. Kids need that.”

Concourse Village Elementary School’s investment in staff and families builds adults’ **social-emotional skills**, for example building their self-awareness (such as in the case of teachers reflecting on their areas of growth) or their stress management (such as in the case of parents learning meditation techniques). Importantly, these investments are targeted to promote the **social-emotional and academic development** of children. As parents grow in their own social-emotional development, children are provided with models and supports of stress management and resilience. As staff are expected to promote consistency and nurture all students, students enjoy the resulting attachment and sense of belonging. As staff apply self-awareness to build their own competencies as teachers, students benefit from the academic learning that is then facilitated. The following examples provide additional detail on the CVES approach to developing adults (in service of developing students):

- Students experience the CVES adult culture as student-centered. One shared, “Ms. Sorden says that if you don’t like the class, it’s because the teacher isn’t teaching you. That’s why she says she doesn’t pick the teachers, we pick them. Once, when Ms. X was trying to become a teacher here, we got to decide. She gave us a mini lesson, and she did a really good job. She gave us enough time, did fun stations, told us what challenge assignments we could do if we finished early.”
- Sorden shared additional details about her approach to finding people who are ready to radically reorient to the school’s model: “I will switch things up when teachers come in for an interview. They’ll think they’re doing a kindergarten demo in math; I’ll switch it to reading. I need to see how people manage frustration. My students need someone who is well put together and who can persevere. I have them stay the whole day. They interact with staff. We give them scenarios, like imagine you have a student come straight from the Dominican Republic who doesn’t speak any English ... what will you do? If their immediate response is ‘I’d feel so bad for them and translate everything ...’ they are not who we need. Their heart is in the right place, but it’s a no.”
- As staff progress in their CVES careers, they note the highly collaborative nature of the work. One shared, “It’s okay here for teachers to come and give me feedback here. When you come and give me feedback, I know you have my best interest and the kids’ best interest in mind. Other schools, you close your door and it’s an island. We’re not running our own business here — in some schools, everyone is running their own business. In other schools no one is open to peer feedback. At the end of the day our priority is to do what is in the best interest of the child.”
- Another staff member shared details about the school’s approach to engaging parents: “We know our work is about what’s going on at home too — it’s not just math, science, and reading. If it’s cold and students don’t have a coat, we pay attention to those things. When we do that, parents and students become open. Families come to us on a Saturday if they have a crisis. We do our best to help them solve their problems, or at least try to help them find a next step.”

## Conclusions

Core elements of the CVES model — systems to foster a safe and nurturing environment, systems to cognitively stimulate students, and investment in adults, who are seen as major influencers of children’s success — enable Comprehensive Student Development. Across its model, CVES demonstrates particular strengths in systematically attending to integration of social-emotional, cognitive, and academic development (though other domains are emphasized via discrete components of the model). The particulars of the CVES model are in part informed by its unique context; however, themes elevated in this case study about what development in these areas looks and feels like and details about how this development occurs are designed to be broadly applicable.

## What enables this success?

The section that follows summarizes aspects of the Concourse Village Elementary School model that enable its success in Comprehensive Student Development. This section is intended to demonstrate the intentionality and comprehensiveness of the school’s approach.

### The “What”: Mission, Vision, and Definition of Student Success

#### Mission/Vision

- Concourse Village Elementary School’s mission includes language that attends to the whole child: “At Concourse Village Elementary School, our mission is to provide a safe and nurturing environment where all students are cognitively stimulated by a rigorous curriculum as well as personally motivated by our core values, which are: Perseverance, Optimism, Willingness, Empathy, and Respect. Through our core values we will foster confident, well-rounded leaders who grow up to be critical thinkers

and socially responsible adults who positively impact the world around them.”

### Overall Ecosystem

- The ecosystem at Concourse Village is grounded in its core values of iPOWER.

### The “How”: Curriculum and Educational Approach

#### Community engagement

- CVES actively engages, in part through the use of applications that allow teachers to share classroom and student-level updates.
- CVES hosts programming to support parents’ development, such as weekly fitness classes, stress management programs, and programs on how to speak with children about finances. This supports parents to access the resources and develop the skills required to promote their children’s development.

#### Instructional methods

- CVES leverages a blended learning model, through which students engage in a range of instructional activities throughout the day: some full-group, some small-group, some one-on-one or independent. This includes some learning that uses technology tools and some learning that does not. The model is designed to facilitate attention to individual students’ unique learning needs, as well as to build student ownership and self-direction.
- CVES places heavy emphasis on short bursts of refreshing/remediating basic language, literacy, and numeracy skills. This helps all students to develop and reinforce strong foundations for deeper learning.

#### Curriculum and materials

- CVES accesses a broad range of curricula, instructional materials, and technology tools to build students’ skills, engage students, and deepen their knowledge. In just a sampling of the resources that educators pull from, CVES uses: Reflex Math, Eureka Math, Mathletics, Freckle, Khan Academy, Zearn, Flocabulary, and Readworks. It employs the Schoology learning management system to help make a cohesive whole of these various materials, as well as the formative data produced by them.

### The “How”: Operational Systems

#### Overall Ecosystem

- Concourse Village Elementary School’s ecosystem is student-centric, such that even staff/parent culture and systems exist expressly for the purpose of serving students.
- The core values (iPOWER) permeate the culture at Concourse Village and are consistently used in everything from teachers explaining systems/procedures, students assessing their learning, and educators reflecting on their practice.

#### Use of physical space

- Concourse Village Elementary School prioritizes comfort in classrooms that is conducive to students feeling safe and nurtured, and thus ready to learn. For example, students have a choice as to the type of seat — from a bouncy chair to a plush cushion — that will enable them to best learn. Classrooms are bright and vibrant, with each grade level decorated according to a theme.
- CVES also requires consistency across classrooms. The same general classroom layout, furniture, even aromatherapy system is used across all classrooms.

#### Use of time

- The first 10 minutes of each day is reserved for morning routines: Breakfast is in the cafeteria before the day officially begins with an individualized morning greeting, dancing to the class’s theme song, recitation of the Scholar’s Creed of Integrity and a mindful exercise for starting your day in a BIG way; Breathe deeply! Initiate your intentions for the day! Get ready to have an awesome day!

### The “Who”: Talent

#### Leadership

- Principal Sorden set a clear vision for teaching and learning at Concourse Village Elementary School, established detailed systems and structures that align to that vision, and consistently holds teachers and students to high expectations in living out those systems and structures. The video here provides more detail on Sorden’s leadership vision: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-OZe6QjppE>.
- At the heart of everything is the school’s core values, which Sorden consistently communicates and reinforces the “why” behind the school’s highly structured environment.

**Staff**

- Staff receive significant training in the systems and structures of the school once hired, including a multiweek training that gets into detail about how to set up a classroom, what procedures to employ, etc.
- Feedback and collaboration are the norm among Concourse Village Elementary School staff, who are expected to visit one another's classrooms regularly (during their extended lunch blocks) to conduct observations and provide peer feedback and coaching to one another.
- Staff regularly self-assess and conference with leadership and peers about their development needs. Five professional development cycles are formed in response to identified needs; they provide staff the opportunity to deeply dive into a particular topic/skill for research, practice, feedback, and reflection.

Learn more at [chanzuckerberg.com/whole-child](https://chan Zuckerberg.com/whole-child)



## Voice of a Leader

### **What are you most proud of at your school?**

I am most proud of the educators who have joined hands with me to create a safe haven for all children. In addition to being a safe and nurturing environment, we also provide rigorous learning conditions that promote thinking and deepen content knowledge. I am proud of the energy and the love for teaching and learning that permeates throughout the school community.

### **What keeps you up at night? What's been hardest?**

What keeps me up at night are the factors outside of my control, such as the children who come and go because they live in shelters and are only at our school for a short time. I wish there was a better way to support these families. As a school we try to catch them up and provide emotional support through counseling, but I worry about the long-term effects of the instability.

I am also up at night thinking of ways to reach every learner. I want to do my best by every child and constantly read or watch webinars on how to improve teaching so that I can better support my educators.

### **Where to next? If your wildest dreams came true, what would we see at your school if we were to visit five years from now?**

Wow, what an awesome question. I see our school receiving the 2nd Blue Ribbon Award for Exemplary Performance. I see a school with a strong blended model from pre-k to fifth grade. I see a group of teachers with strong experience who are able to meet the needs of all learners in their classroom. I see a group of high school volunteers (former scholars) who are giving back to the school they dearly love. Overall, the strong sense of community continues to be what stands out alongside a group of children who perform on or above grade level expectations. These students have a strong sense of why they are learning in connection to what they are learning.