



RITUALS THAT BUILD MINDFULNESS AND CONNECTION



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**CONCOURSE VILLAGE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
BRONX, NY

“It was important for us to create a community where students saw themselves in a positive light. So the idea of starting every single day with an affirmation, it was to give voice to who you really are.”

ALEXA SORDEN
Founding Principal

In 2013, educator Alexa Sorden founded Concourse Village Elementary School at a site that had previously closed due to a “persistently dangerous” status and low performance. Sorden was brought up in nearby Washington Heights, where she learned the value of establishing a climate of trust, safety, and care for learners.

To establish this climate at Concourse Village where she remains as founding principal, Sorden designed and implemented a set of schoolwide experiences that are student-centered and aligned with the school’s core values of integrity, perseverance, optimism, willingness, empathy, and respect. These include personalized morning greetings, a [Scholar’s Creed of Integrity](#), and the mindfulness practice known as BIG (breathe deeply, initiate your learning intentions, and get ready to have a great learning session) that helps students prepare for learning.

These experiences are rituals, distinct from routines in that they are performed in a series of steps but also embedded in a larger system of meaning.¹ At Concourse Village, Sorden says these rituals promote two important practices for members of the school community: positive self-talk and mindfulness.

Rituals for positive self-talk

Each student is welcomed to classrooms with a greeting of their choice — from foot shakes to wiggles — helping them start the day on a positive note. They then recite the Scholar’s Creed of Integrity, which was written in response to research on the impact of messages children hear about themselves. Studies have shown that self-affirmation exercises can mitigate the impacts of “stereotype threat,” which is when performance



“I really wanted to remove the idea of compliant behavior for both teachers and students. I wanted them to be present . . . if in that moment you see a greater need or you have to shift something, I want you to. I want you to because you’re aware and you’re present.”

ALEXA SORDEN
Founding Principal

on assessments is negatively impacted by unconscious worries about confirming negative stereotypes.² Stress often activates stereotype threat, while practicing rituals can decrease uncertainty and anxiety and improve self-regulation and goal-directed performance.³

Rituals for mindfulness

The BIG mindfulness practice (explained above) is incorporated throughout the day to encourage students to remain present during learning. Principal Sorden developed BIG to give Concourse Village students and teachers alike time to pause, regulate their nervous systems, and notice any feelings or thoughts that might require attention before transitioning to a new lesson. These actions can make students feel safe and welcome while developing their self-regulation and stress management skills.⁴ Evidence has shown that mindfulness strategies can also have a positive impact on educators’ sleep, self-regulation, and self-compassion, as well as their overall job satisfaction, which can mitigate the challenge of teacher burnout and turnover.⁵

In addition to increasing focus that may translate into stronger learning outcomes and greater teacher retention, these mindfulness rituals also promote a sense of community at Concourse Village by promoting responsive relationships between teachers and students and a strong climate and culture of connectedness.

Concourse Village Elementary BY THE NUMBERS

Number of Students	292
Geographic Setting	Urban
Grades Served	Pre-K–5
School Model	Traditional public school
Conditions for Equitable Learning & Development	Personal & Learning Environment

Student Demographics	66% Latinx*
	32% Black
	1% White
	1% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
	0% Native American*/Alaska Native
	0% Multiracial
	22% Students with disabilities
9% English language learners	
85% Eligible for free/reduced-price lunch	

*Student Demographic data sourced from data.nysed.gov and nces.ed.gov. NCES lists Latinx as “Hispanic” and Native American as “American Indian.”

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Consider while you listen . . .

COMMUNITY NEED

Alexa Sorden, Founding Principal at Concourse Elementary School, provided some context around the school's closing and reopening. What is the value of creating shared rituals for a community that has experienced instability? Does your school have any shared routines or rituals?

SELF-AFFIRMATION

The Concourse Village school community is predominantly made up of students of color and families from low SES backgrounds. What kind of messages do you think these families hear about themselves in society? How might self-affirmation exercises like the Scholar's Creed of Integrity combat these messages?

MINDFULNESS

BIG was implemented at the school as a mindfulness routine. What are the benefits of mindfulness and meditation? How might these benefits transfer to a school community's climate and culture? (Consider measures such as discipline, attendance, etc.)

Related Resources



This WestEd [brief](#) explores mindfulness as a strategy for facilitating well-being in school, including benefits for students and educators, examples of mindfulness strategies, and resources for learning more.



Watch this [video](#) to see how Concourse Village Elementary's principal and staff created engaging video lessons for remote learning.



This [episode](#) of NPR's Hidden Brain podcast discusses how rituals can increase trust and cooperation.

Conditions for Learning and Development

In their work, school leaders and educators must attend to a range of conditions that can promote — or inhibit — learning and development.⁶ These include Personal Conditions, Learning Environment Conditions, and System Conditions.

PERSONAL CONDITIONS

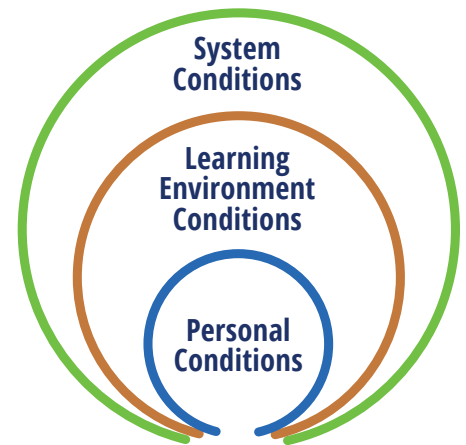
Conditions that bolster and ensure health and well-being within individuals in school communities, including social and emotional health and well-being as well as the physical, mental, and behavioral health of students and the adults who care for them.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CONDITIONS

Conditions that foster safe, supportive environments and responsive, reliable relationships. These conditions include school climate and trauma-informed and restorative practices, as well as the policies, structures, and systems in place at the district, school, and classroom levels. Together, these can promote resilience, provide protective factors, and ensure that every person — regardless of background, circumstance, or identity — can learn, grow, and thrive.

SYSTEM CONDITIONS

Conditions stemming from the complex community and social factors that can influence health and well-being. Here, cross-sector collaboration between schools and other sectors — such as health, mental health, justice, child welfare, housing, and anti-poverty efforts — can accelerate schools' positive impacts on the development and well-being of students and families.



¹Hobson, N. M., Bonk, D., & Inzlicht, M. (2017). *Rituals decrease the neural response to performance failure*. *PeerJ*, 5, e3363. <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.3363>

²Cohen, G. L., Garcia, J., Apfel, N., & Master, A. (2006). Reducing the racial achievement gap: A social-psychological intervention. *Science*, 313(5791), 1307–1310.

³Hobson, N. M., Bonk, D., & Inzlicht, M. (2017). Rituals decrease the neural response to performance failure. *PeerJ*, 5, e3363. <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.3363>

⁴Browning, A. (2020). *Mindfulness in education: An approach to cultivating self-awareness that can bolster kids' learning* [Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety at WestEd]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

⁵Frank, J. L., Reibel, D., Broderick, P., Cantrell, T., & Metz, S. (2015). The effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction on educator stress and well-being: Results from a pilot study. *Mindfulness*, 6(2), 208–216. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-013-0246-2>

⁶Garcia Coll, C., Lamberty, G., Jenkins, R., McAdoo, H. P., Crnic, K., Wasik, B. H., & Garcia, H. V. (1996). An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. *Child Development*, 67(5), 1891–1914. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131600>



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