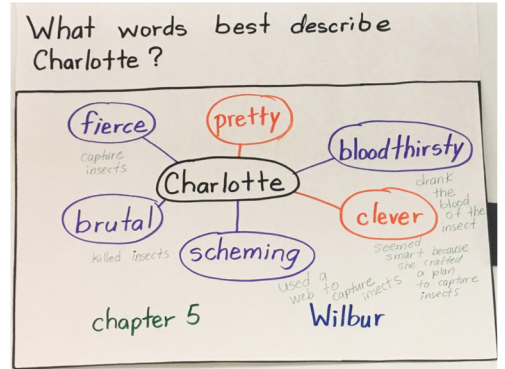
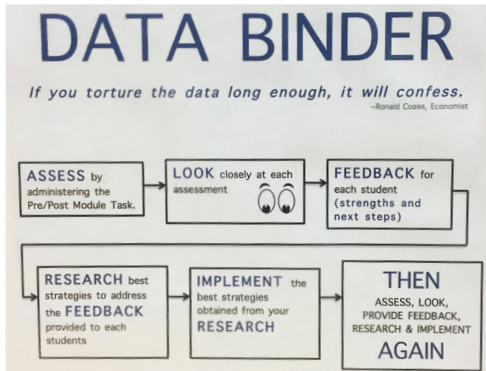




Concourse Village Elementary School, Bronx, New York City DOE



Concourse Village Elementary School (CVES), part of the New York City DOE, serves a highly diverse community in the South Bronx, with many families from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Africa. Founding Principal Alexa Sorden was asked to oversee the opening of the new school in 2013 to replace a school that was closed due to performance. She and her team launched the school in 2013-2014 with Pre-K through 2nd grade; they have since grown with the students and now serve Pre-K through 5th grade. Alexa turned to Thinking Maps in the spring of the school’s first year to give her students sustainable strategies for learning.

SNAPSHOT

Concourse Village Elementary

- Pre-K-5
- 356 students
- 45 teachers
- 98% Free/Reduced Lunch
- 27% Students with Disabilities
- 26% English Language Learners (ELL)

A SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS TO HELP EVERY STUDENT SUCCEED

When Alexa took the job at CVES, she knew there would be challenges, including attendance, parental involvement, language proficiency, and high student turnover. Most of the students served by CVES come from families living in poverty, including some living in temporary shelters. The school that previously served the neighborhood ranked among the bottom in the district for student performance. However, Alexa takes a “no excuses” approach when it comes to ensuring student success. She came across Thinking Maps during the school’s first year while researching strategies to help her students better access grade-level content. Specifically, she wanted a tool that could help students make their thinking visible.

Alexa says, “I didn’t want just another new program or something that would not be sustainable. I wanted something that allows the child to have ownership of the strategy.” She was attracted to Thinking Maps because the Maps were simple, did not require the purchase of consumable student materials, and could be used across all grades and content areas. She also believed that the visual language for learning would help her students.

“We know that learning is 75% visual, and Thinking Maps taps into that.”

- Alexa Sorden, Founding Principal

BUILDING THE MAPS INTO THE CURRICULUM

Alexa and two of her lead teachers joined a Thinking Maps leadership training in the spring of 2014. That summer, the entire teaching staff of CVES attended Thinking Maps training. They followed up the training with an eight-week rollout of the Maps at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. “I wanted all of the teachers to be certified Thinking Maps Trainers,” Alexa explains. “It’s easier that way. I need everyone to own it for themselves, and not think of it as someone else’s responsibility.”

Since then, the Maps have become embedded in everything at the school. Students use them in every classroom across all content areas. Thinking Maps is used to support a learner-centered approach that utilizes an entirely homegrown curriculum. Alexa and her staff developed their own curriculum around the Common Core State Standards and the specific needs of their students. Thinking Maps are embedded throughout. Often, multiple Maps are used in the course of a lesson to drive deeper understanding. Students may use a Circle Map to list their background knowledge at

the beginning of the lesson, a Tree Map to take notes as they are learning, and additional Maps to further compare, classify and analyze information. The Maps are even used at the Pre-K level, where students may use pictures to create Maps with the help of a teacher.

Alexa appreciated the practicality of the Thinking Maps approach, which does not require consumable workbooks or downloadable worksheets. She says, “All you need is a blank sheet of paper. And the Maps don’t dictate to the child—the child owns them. It’s not like a worksheet where they have 10 blank lines and they feel like they have to fill them in a certain way. Because the Maps are open ended, I see more ownership of the results and more creativity in the thinking.”

“I fell in love with Thinking Maps the first time I saw a demo lesson. Everything was just so clear and so practical. I knew my students would benefit from it.”

- Alexa Sorden, Founding Principal

A WHOLE-SCHOOL COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

CVES has maintained its commitment to Thinking Maps. As the school has grown and added new teachers, they have all attended Thinking Maps training, and many returning teachers have attended refresher training as well. In addition, they are in the process of implementing Path to Proficiency to better serve their English Language Learners, and have completed several modules of *Write from the Beginning...and Beyond* (including *Setting the Stage, Response to Literature, Narrative, and Expository*), and have worked with the *Comprehension Strategies for Constructing Meaning* module.

Alexa emphasizes the need for fidelity of implementation across the school. “It has to be part of the culture,” she says. “You have to have

a clear vision for why you are doing it and what you are trying to achieve. I tell my teachers this is not one more thing I am adding onto their plate. I am giving them a tool that makes their lives easier. Most importantly, it’s right for the kids, and, for me, that makes it a non-negotiable.”

That commitment to fidelity is paying off. Just three years after replacing a school closed due to poor performance, CVES is now ranked 7th out of over 1,800 schools in New York City on the state mathematics test and 9th in English Language Arts. In 2015-2016, students at CVES achieved 94% proficient or above in literacy and 98% proficient or above in math—compared to single-digit proficiency levels in the school CVES replaced. Alexa credits this success

to the student-centered curriculum they have developed, including the use of Thinking Maps, as well as the dedication of her handpicked staff. But when asked what she is most proud of at her school, she doesn’t hesitate: “My students. They all come with their own stories, but they come with a great attitude and a desire to learn. They make this work worthwhile.”

“When everyone is using the same language, the students own the strategies. It becomes automatic for them. When they see a problem in front of them, they know how to reach for the right Map to work through their thinking.”

- Alexa Sorden, Founding Principal

CONCOURSE VILLAGE ELEMENTARY

WHAT LED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE THINKING MAPS IMPLEMENTATION?

CONCLUSION:

Alexa credits the success of CVES to the student-centered curriculum they have developed, including the use of Thinking Maps®, as well as the dedication of her staff.

EVIDENCE:

2016 **94%** proficient or above on state ELA tests
2016 **98%** proficient or above on state Math tests
2016 **#7** in NYC in Mathematics
2016 **#9** in NYC in ELA

There is a commitment to fidelity and a “clear vision” for the Thinking Maps® implementation across the school.

Thinking Maps® “is a part of the culture of the school.”

Teachers understand that Thinking Maps® is not “one more thing we are adding to their plate. We are giving them a tool that makes their lives easier.”

Dedicated teachers believe Thinking Maps® are “right for the kids,” and using them is non-negotiable.

Thinking Maps® are a valuable, best practice that is sustainable.

The Thinking Maps® implementation at CVES is successful in supporting the improvement of student achievement.

CONCLUSION:

Alexa says, “I fell in love with Thinking Maps® the first time I saw a demo lesson. Everything was just so practical. I knew my students would benefit from it.”
Your students will too!

INFLUENCE:

CVES educators have a “no excuses” approach when it comes to student success.