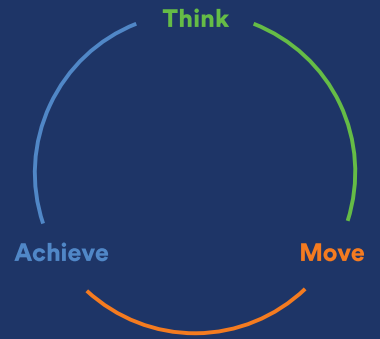


PE WORKS

STORIES OF CHANGE
SPRING 2020



I.S. 514 NEW DESIGN MIDDLE SCHOOL, MANHATTAN



PE Works Stories of Change feature principals and staff who are making changes so that PE is a meaningful part of each child's school experience. Their work marks the beginning of developing a physically literate, health-centered generation of New York City students.

NYC

Department of
Education

Office of School
Wellness Programs

I.S. 514 NEW DESIGN MIDDLE SCHOOL, MANHATTAN

When Principal Marcellus Stovall arrived

at New Design Middle School in 2018, he discovered that the school did not provide physical education to its 145 students. The school had a vibrant dance program that provided kids with regular movement as part of arts education, but it did not provide students with the full range of what they need to learn in PE class. Among many other skills, this includes how to set individual fitness goals, be good team players, and become part of a healthy community. The dance program time also did not count toward the State PE requirement of 90 minutes per week for middle schoolers. Since PE is critical for developing the knowledge, skills, and motivation that lead to lifelong physical fitness, Mr. Stovall made building a high-quality PE program a top priority, budgeting for and hiring the school's first full-time, certified PE teacher, Ms. Patricia "Trish" Vernon.

Ms. Vernon had coached volleyball at Fordham University before going back to school for her second master's degree in education. While pursuing her degree, Ms. Vernon completed an internship at a charter school. New Design marked her first year as a full-time teacher.

Teamwork Is the Dreamwork

As a new PE teacher, Ms. Vernon found instructional coaching, expanded by the PE Works initiative to provide one-on-one training and support, to be a lifeline. Ms. Vernon completed two 10-week cycles with her instructional coach Mr. Keith Dunbar, who helped her set goals, plan lessons, and improve student en-

gagement and learning through observation and feedback. During a spring coaching cycle, Mr. Dunbar and Ms. Vernon reviewed a lesson plan focused on communication that included a warm-up called Look Up, Look Down, Look Now. The warm-up, followed by an obstacle course activity, was aligned to the "Community Building" theme in the *New York City Grades 6-12 Physical Education Scope and Sequence*, a comprehensive curricular planning resource developed as part of PE Works. Through co-



Principal Marcellus Stovall

operative games and challenges, community building creates positive connections to physical activity, increasing student participation and motivation.

Mr. Dunbar suggested modifying the warm-up. “Instead of running laps after making eye contact, what about high fiving the person and switching spots in the circle? This works for a small group to keep kids in the circle and levels up the objective of communication and connection.”

Ms. Vernon agreed to try it out with her 6th-grade class designed for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Communication, especially eye contact, can be challenging for middle school students in general and more specifically for students who are on the autism spectrum. Keeping students in the circle and connecting with a fun high five seemed like a good way to positively reinforce eye contact.

Ms. Vernon picked up her class on the first floor and walked them upstairs to the gym. As soon as the students entered, they added their ideas and signatures to a poster titled “Safety Rules.” Then they circled for the warm-up. Ms. Vernon explained the rules of Look Up, Look Down, Look Now. Each time two students made eye contact, they high fived and switched

spots. The coaching suggestion worked well for this small group of seven students and prepared them for the next challenge: an obstacle course formed out of a rainbow array of hurdles, hula hoops, and cones.

Students broke into pairs and then chose who would lead and who would follow. Their tool to navigate the maze? Verbal communication. With eyes closed, the follower moved


through the maze, avoiding obstacles by listening to the leader’s directions. After students gave the maze a try, Ms. Vernon asked them to meet by the posters to regroup. This time they focused on respectful communication.

“What’s a good word to use if you see your partner is about to touch something?” she asked.

“Freeze!” was the most popular answer.

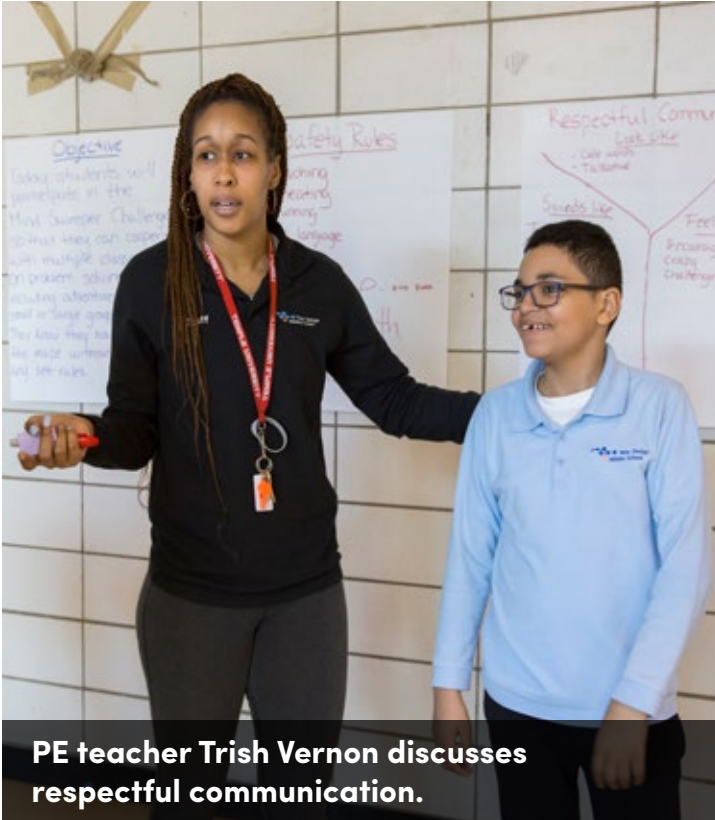
Students answered the question, “What did it feel like when your partner was guiding you?” with words like “safe” and “trusting.” What did respectful communication sound like? “Good job. Now step right.”

As they returned to the maze, Ms. Vernon reminded them to “Use your ears, not your eyes.” This time, they switched leader and follower roles and added a new challenge—walk

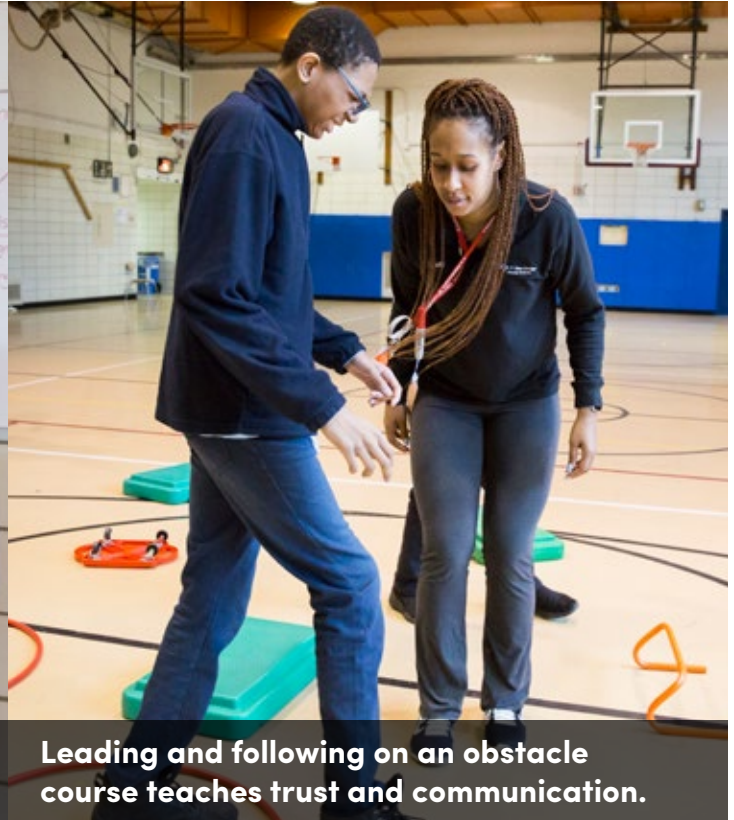


“Community building creates positive connections to physical activity, increasing student participation and motivation.”

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PE teacher Trish Vernon discusses respectful communication.



Leading and following on an obstacle course teaches trust and communication.

backward. Students had a ton of fun as they adapted their strategies whenever their partners bumped into objects and had to restart the maze. After walking a few laps around the gym for cool down, students circled up to debrief. “I learned that I can trust Alex. He helped us get through.” “When Kevin let go, I couldn’t trust him.” “Walking and talking with Jojo, I felt confident.”

Finding Room to Grow

One challenge that Mr. Stovall and Ms. Vernon faced in the quest to revitalize PE was simply finding space. New Design shares the Terence D. Tolbert Educational Complex with the KIPP Infinity and KIPP STAR charter schools. Located on the first floor, New Design has 17 classrooms

including a dedicated dance studio. But the second-floor gymnasium is used by all three schools. Mr. Stovall and Ms. Vernon aren’t alone in dealing with complex scheduling for common spaces. Multiple schools sharing a building or campus, known as co-location, is the reality for more than half of NYC DOE schools.

To work out gymnasium and cafeteria schedules, Mr. Stovall meets monthly with the principals from the KIPP charter schools. Ms. Vernon also regularly connects with the KIPP schools’ PE teachers to negotiate day-to-day needs for equipment and special schedules.

One way to relieve the pressure of shared spaces is to step outside. Through a partnership with the DOE’s Office of School Wellness Programs, the NYC Department of Transpor-

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tation, and the non-profit Bike New York, New Design was invited to participate in the 7th grade Bike Safety Education Program. The program provided mountain bikes, helmets, a curriculum, teacher training, and on-site support. In addition to using bikes during PE instruction, the entire school had access to free “learn to ride” field trips where students reviewed bike safety and left the West Harlem campus for a ride along the Hudson River.

Ms. Vernon led a three-week PE unit for 7th graders that aligned to the “Individual Performance” theme in the Scope and Sequence. The unit included bike safety outcomes like wearing a helmet and learning traffic rules. She differentiated instruction to address the range of experience levels, starting with the basics for a handful of students who had never ridden a

bike before. Very quickly, all students were able to ride around the courtyard.

For the high point of the unit, Ms. Vernon took her 7th graders on an offsite ride along the Hudson River Greenway. When one student’s bicycle chain popped off the track on the way back to school, the kids stopped to problem-solve. They needed to get back in time to present about the bike program to NYC DOE staff. The solution: Ms. Vernon swapped bikes so that the student could ride with the other chaperones while she walked the bike back to school.

The unexpected delay added drama to their presentation, but also demonstrated how PE helped build community spirit. “You know you’re doing something right when kids feel like your crew,” Ms. Vernon said.

What is PE Works?

PE Works is Mayor Bill de Blasio’s unprecedented multiyear investment to revitalize physical education (PE) for every student in NYC public schools. Prior to 2015, the quantity and quality of PE varied from school to school, and very few elementary schools met State PE requirements with certified PE teachers. Building on an eight-district pilot in 2015–16, the New York City Department of Education set out to revitalize PE Citywide in 2016–17 with funding and support in three areas: investing in teachers, building PE into school environments, and developing communities that are proud of PE.

RESOURCES

New York City K-12 Physical Education Scope and Sequence documents: This comprehensive curricular resource is [available on WeTeachNYC \(opens in new window\)](#).

PE Instructional Coaching: K-12 PE teachers can strengthen their practice with personalized instructional support. Check the [Office of School Wellness Programs Professional Learning Catalog \(opens in new window\)](#) for upcoming dates.

Bike New York: Learn more about the grade 7 Bike Safety Education Program by emailing rconroy@bike.nyc. Visit the [Bike New York education page \(opens in new window\)](#) for information about bike field trips and safety assemblies.