VALOR COLLEGIATE ACADEMIES

PERSONALIZED LEARNING FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

> *At Valor, we believe that our school models must change over time to support healthy adolescent development. We call that transition 'Gradual Release.'*
>
> **TODD DICKSON, FOUNDER AND CEO**

KEY FEATURES:

- ☑ **New School**
- ☑ **Station Rotation, Lab Rotation, and Flex Blended Model**
- ☑ **Next Generation Staffing Model**
- ☑ **Higher Education Partnership**
- ☑ **Social-Emotional Development**

AT A GLANCE:

Start Date: Fall 2014
Grades Served: 5-12
Location: Nashville, TN
Operator: Valor Collegiate Academies
Operator Type: Charter
Setting: Urban
Students at Start: 150
Students at Capacity: 1,120

MODEL TOOLBOX:

Learning Management System:
Activate Instruction, Kickboard

Student Information System:
PowerSchool, Illuminate

Assessment Tools and Approaches: Illuminate

Digital Content Providers:
Middlebury PowerSpeak K-12 World Languages, iReady, Khan Academy, Curriculet, Scratch, Code Academy, Achieve 3000

Hardware: Chromebooks

The Vision: When the Valor leadership team began to design a next generation school, they first asked: How can we create a school that prepares <u>all</u> students to succeed in college and live inspired, purposeful lives?

They then identified three critical needs: (1) Schools in the U.S. are more segregated now than in 1950. (2) The country needs more great educators and new ways to attract, develop, and retain top talent in education. (3) A negative consequence of higher accountability is the narrowing of the curriculum at a time when skills needed for success in college and beyond are more focused on high emotional intelligence.

They also visited high-performing schools that are employing radically different models, like Summit Public Schools, Denver School of Science & Technology, High Tech High, and Uncommon Schools. They ended up with four principles to guide their school design:

1. Reflect the diversity of both our country and local community.
2. Personalize a student's experience to meet his/her unique academic and non-academic needs.
3. Leverage a strong school community to create self-directed learners.
4. Develop a new approach for selecting, training, <u>and</u> retaining great teachers.

The Academic Model: Valor is purposefully designed to serve a diverse, mixed-income student population—academically, it allows for multiple perspectives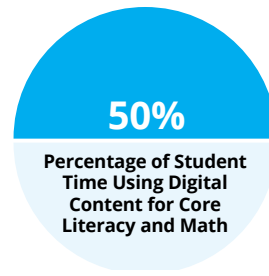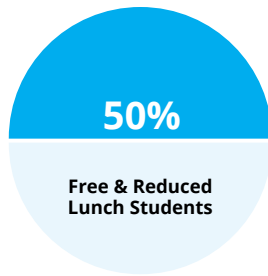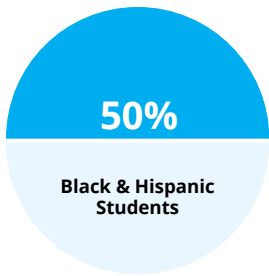 that can improve self-awareness and critical thinking; and socially, it prepares students to live and work in diverse communities.

In a school where a single model needs to work for all students across a wide range of backgrounds, academic preparation, and life experience, Valor created a "gradual release" personalized learning design with four stages. Based on research on adolescent development, the design allows students to take greater control and responsibility as they progress from 5th to 12th grade.

<u>Mastery and pace:</u> Competency-based grading requires students to master all course standards as well as "VCA competencies" (higher-order combinations of course standards). Students incrementally set their own pace across the four stages, from within a single lesson unit in Stages 1 and 2 to within and across courses by Stage 4.

<u>Social-emotional learning:</u> Valor is passionate about whole child personalization with rigorous data-driven instruction in non-academic areas of student growth. This involves collecting and using non-cognitive data to inform instruction as well as a mentoring program that leverages the powerful personalization that comes from great relationships between teachers and students.

A faculty mentor meets with each student weekly and oversees the student's development over the course of eight years. Mentor groups engage in community-building activities and a curriculum focused on social-emotional learning, teen wellness, meditation, and fitness.

50%

Black & Hispanic Students

50%

Free & Reduced Lunch Students

50%

Percentage of Student Time Using Digital Content for Core Literacy and Math

BLENDED SUBJECTS:
English Language Arts, Math, Foreign Language, Science

The Organizational Model: The instructional shifts across stages translate into shifts in staffing, which emphasizes content experts in the early stages and in the later stages uses both content experts and coaches who have expertise in non-cognitive skill development.

Teachers work in groups of two to four, depending on stage and subject area, to teach an academic course. This enables flexible grouping and teacher roles can shift based on strengths and topics.

To train teachers in the Valor blended model, students admitted into Vanderbilt University's Masters of Education/Credential program are selected to participate in the Valor Apprentice program and offered a $15,000 stipend. Apprentice teachers work with a master Valor teacher during Academic sessions and then teach their own Expedition course where they are observed and coached by Valor and Vanderbilt faculty.

Valor provides teachers with 57 days per year of personalized professional development. Following a learning map, professional development experiences include real-time team teaching practice with video, role playing, in-depth content exploration, and data analysis and action plans. The frequent breaks in Valor's calendar support ongoing professional development, teacher resilience, and retention.

The Operator: Valor Collegiate Academies is a new charter management organization in Nashville, TN that plans to open six schools over five years to serve 3,200 students. The school district in Nashville has expressed interest in importing key pieces of Valor's model into local public schools, an opportunity for Valor to extend its reach.

Valor is interested in taking on some of the leading work in social-emotional learning. They are working with Six Seconds to build learning maps, standards, assessments, and playlists for key non-academic areas and with Kickboard to build a dashboard/platform to manage non-academic data. The end result will be that students, teachers, and families can set goals, have discussions, design learning paths, and ultimately grow in these important areas

GRADUAL RELEASE FROM "FOUNDATIONS" TO "LIFE U"

	Stage 1 5th & 6th	Stage 2 7th & 8th	Stage 3 9th & 10th	Stage 4 11th & 12th
	Foundations	HS Prep	College Prep	Life U
Adolescent Development	Seeks community and validation from adults	Seeks community and validation from peers and adults	Beginning to individuate; seeks wider community	Seeks autonomy and leadership; seeks place in larger community
Mastery and Pace	Unit "cap" + deeper differentiation	Unit "cap" + deeper differentiation	Course "cap" + deeper differentiation	Uncapped + modeled/actual college courses
Use of Blended Learning Technology	Peripheral + Complementary	Complementary	Complementary	Complementary + Core
Instruction Model	Small class rotation + learning lab	Large class rotation + learning lab	Large class rotation + learning lab	Flex model
Class Size	30 (1-2 teachers)	50 (2-3 teachers)	100 (4 teachers)	130 (2-4 teachers)

Students progressively earn more autonomy and control over their learning path as they demonstrate key academic and non-academic skills. Blended instruction mirrors that gradual release. Stage 1 predominantly features direct instruction with some group work using a daily Learning Lab rotation. Stages 2 and 3 use station rotations within classrooms. Stage 4 involves a flex model with significant personalized learning time where students design their own "learning path" of both in-person and online content and receive targeted coaching.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

School URL: http://www.valorcollegiate.org/
Contact: Todd Dickson, tdickson@valorcollegiate.org

NEXT GENERATION LEARNING CHALLENGES

nextgenlearning.org