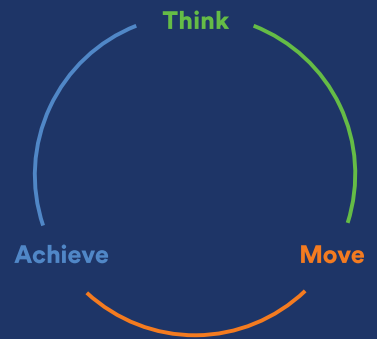
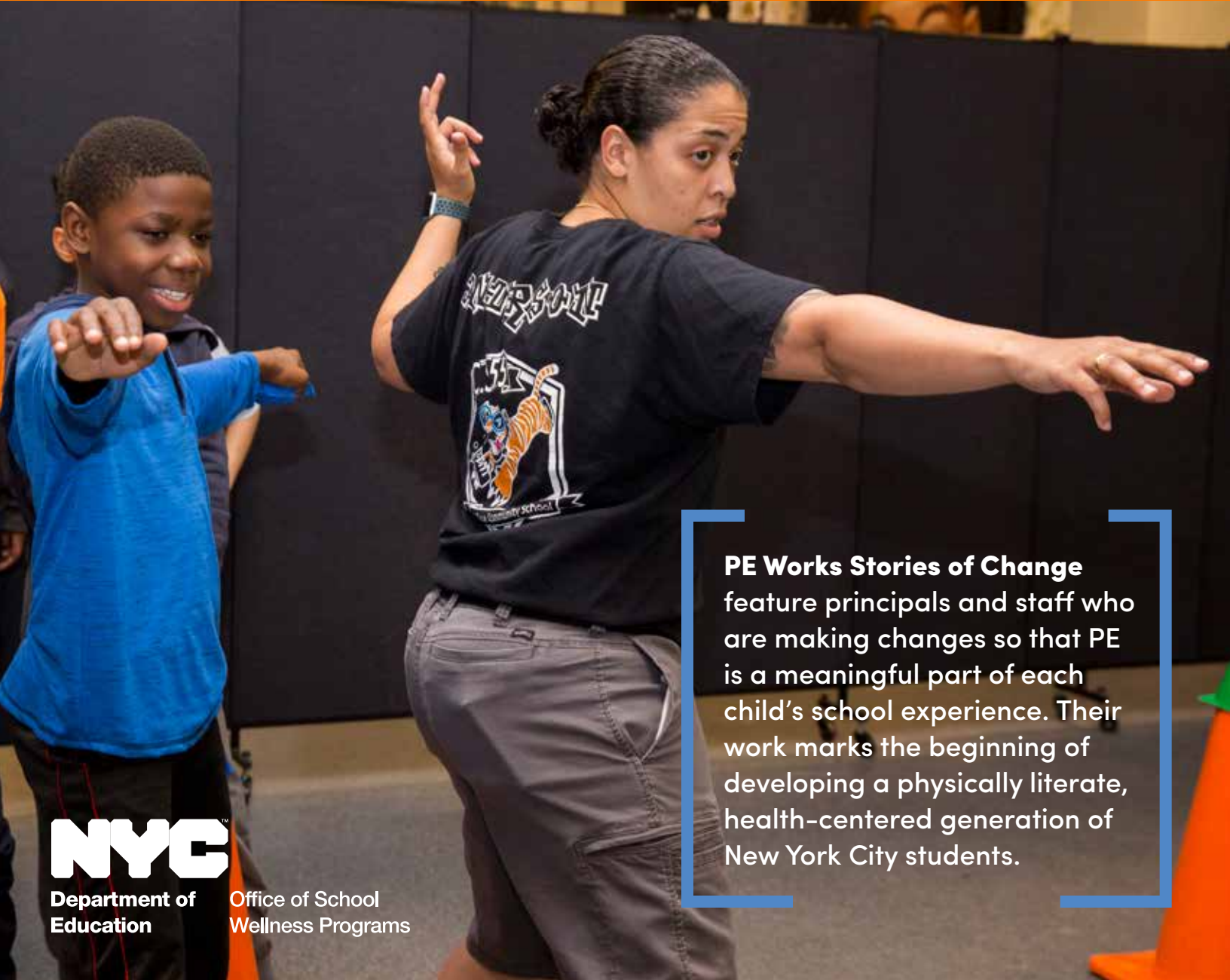


# PE WORKS

STORIES OF CHANGE  
SPRING 2020



## P.S. 55 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, BRONX



**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.



Department of  
Education

Office of School  
Wellness Programs

# P.S. 55 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, BRONX

## Living up to the P.S. 55 Benjamin Franklin

motto “A True Community School,” Principal Luis Torres encourages his staff and students to collaborate and to embrace a mindset of all teach, all learn. Mr. Torres himself is always learning, always looking for inspiration: “I look at China, where the school day starts with physical activities. Exercise releases endorphins that open our brains for learning.”

Recognizing the importance of integrating physical activity into the school day, Mr. Torres championed a robust PE program led by teachers who are always striving for the next level. When he hired Ms. Janice Anderson, a certified PE teacher, to join his staff in 2016, she immediately embraced P.S.

55’s spirit of collaboration and constant growth.

While observing other classroom teachers at the school, Ms. Anderson noticed how they used a red-yellow-green stoplight to manage student behavior. Typically, green means a student is doing what they need to be doing. Yellow is a warning; students may need to slow down and adjust their behavior. Red means stop—that a behavior has crossed the line.

Ms. Anderson thought that the familiar system could be adapted for student self-assessment in PE class. Instead of creating a stoplight out of construction paper, she attached three index-sized cards in red, yellow, and green to a key ring and made one set per student. On the red cards, she wrote “Rookie.” On the yellow cards, she wrote



From left: Assistant Principal George Martinek, Jr. with Principal Luis Torres

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“Pro.” Green became “All Star.” She gave the colors different meaning. Green meant, “This is easy. I can help others.” Yellow meant that that the student might need more practice or help, but they’re on their way to mastering the skill. Red no longer served as the equivalent of a finger wag. Being a Rookie simply meant you were beginning to learn a skill.

This simple but effective idea transformed her teaching, impacted her fellow P.S. 55 PE teacher colleague, and then radiated out to her PE colleagues in the Bronx.

## All Teach, All Learn

Whenever Ms. Anderson started a new unit, she asked students to rate themselves on a skill by holding up a red, yellow, or green card. During or after each skill-building activity, students used the cards to reassess their skill level. The Rookie-Pro-All Star system proved to be motivating

even for students who usually preferred to sit on the sidelines. Because kids had to get up, move, and attempt the skill-building activities in order to rate themselves, she noticed more students gave activities a try so that they could flip their cards from red to yellow to green.

She also found the cards played into elementary students’ social nature. Students with green cards offered to help classmates with red or yellow cards.

Ms. Anderson sometimes asked students to pair up with someone holding the same color, or for All-Stars to pair up with Rookies and Pros.

After testing out her system, Ms. Anderson shared what she had developed with her coworkers, including Assistant Principal George Martinek, Jr. Mr. Martinek liked that Rookie-Pro-All Star used the stoplight color-coding, so that students could build on something familiar but create new connections and meaning. Ms. Anderson “always goes above and beyond,” he said. “She steps up and takes the lead.”

Inspired by Ms. Anderson, her PE teacher colleague used her system to check in with students at the beginning of class. “How are you doing today?” he asked. Her colleague shared honestly with the students that he was not feeling too great and showed his red card. Then he shifted the focus to the “I Can” statements on the wall and

reminded students to look at the progress they’d made over the past few weeks. Students looked at their dots on a chart, evidence of his attention to detail.

Next, he demonstrated tasks at each activity station. When he showed them how to bounce a ball into a cone, he saw one yellow card among a sea of green cards, signaling that one student needed more help. He asked that student to assist with the

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demonstration and kept the other students engaged by asking questions: What does he need to do to catch the ball? What did you observe? What can you try to do differently when it's your turn? When Ms. Anderson's colleague bounced the ball and the student caught it in the cone, his classmates clapped for him as he moved from Rookie to Pro.

## Creating a Community for PE Teachers

Since the definition of community extends beyond the school's walls, Ms. Anderson volunteered to present her self-assessment stoplight tool to the District 9 PE Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting. Launched as part of the PE Works initiative, PE PLCs offer PE teachers the opportunity to network and share best practices, and are essential to the mission of providing high-quality PE. While classroom teachers on each grade can consult each other about problems of practice, many schools only have one PE teacher, meaning they have no other subject-area experts in the building to rely on. PE PLCs, which meet monthly in

each borough, provide a regular forum for sharing lesson plans, brainstorming new ideas, and asking for advice from trusted colleagues.

The Walton Avenue School, about a mile west of P.S. 55, hosted the District 9 PE PLC meeting. Facilitators Ms. Alexandra Cappello from the Walton Avenue School, and Mr. Scott Gargani from P.S. 130 Abram Stevens Hewitt, formed a dynamic duo. Their preparation included a slide deck, a thoughtful agenda, and handouts paired with colorful six-inch dice that dotted the round tables in the school library.

Mr. Gargani opened with an energizing ice-breaker called "Dice and Stretch." After teachers rolled the dice, they checked the accompanying worksheet to find out which movement correlated to the number and then performed the movement. One table rolled a four and did four squats. As more teachers arrived, they jumped right in with a roll of the dice. Everyone participated enthusiastically, happy to move and play as they settled into the space.



The "Rookie-Pro-All Star" self-assessment station created by PE teacher Janice Anderson.



Students participating in the "Rookie-Pro-All Star" self-assessment activity.

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Each month, the focus of the PLC meeting changes. When the facilitators put out a call for self-assessment tools, Ms. Anderson led a discussion about her stoplight system at one of the round-robin tables. She showed the laminated red, yellow, and green cards on a key ring. She also shared a variation with each student's name written on popsicle sticks that kids then dropped into plastic cups marked Rookie, Pro, and All Star. Ms. Anderson was honest with the group: Setting up the stoplight system had been time-consuming initially, but the payoff was worth it. Colleagues asked questions about implementation and effectiveness. In thinking about their own students, they also raised questions about how to modify and use the system with English Language Learners (ELLs).

For Ms. Anderson, the conversation about ELL students sparked a new idea. She had noticed that her younger classes had more and more Spanish-



**PE teacher Janice Anderson and colleagues at a District 9 PE Professional Learning Community meeting.**

speaking students from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. She realized that she needed to make Rookie-Pro-All Star cards in Spanish as well as in English. That's what makes Ms. Anderson a true All Star: she's determined to keep on learning, to keep on striving to reach the next level.

## 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

Physical Education Professional Learning Communities

- Meet monthly on Mondays in each borough (online format added in April 2020 in response to COVID-19)
- Open to K-12 physical education teachers as a means of collaboration and strengthening instructional practice
- Some meetings serve a specific grade band or student population
- Sign up through the [Office of School Wellness Programs Professional Learning Catalog](#) (link opens in new window)

**Questions? Email [PEworks@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:PEworks@schools.nyc.gov)**