

Educating Children to be Citizens of the World

By Charlena Wynn

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Why do we educate children?

Kriste Dragon, co-founder and chief executive officer of Citizens of the World Charter Schools (CWC), wants educators, parents, caregivers and child advocates to ask themselves just that.

For parents of CWC students, educating children entails more than grades. Education is about fostering understanding so that students learn how to think abstractly and critically and live together with their differences instead of in spite of the very things that make them unique.

As a successful educator who has managed Teach for America regional leaders, facilitated trainings for Los Angeles Unified School District teachers and now leads Citizens of the World Charter Schools, Dragon has made it her mission to provide exceptional quality education to all children.

Citizens of the World Charter Schools are a national network of schools located in Los Angeles and New York, and opening in Kansas City in 2016.

The universal appeal of the structure of CWC has driven parents like those in Kansas City to demand better education for their children that is “rigorous, joyful and reflects the diversity of their communities.”

Communal involvement brought Kansas City parents to CWC as they were frustrated with the school system in Midtown, prompting them to form Midtown Community Schools Initiative.

According to Dragon, this was one of the first parent initiatives that she has seen that has blossomed into an “extraordinary partnership.”

Midtown parents formed a proposal for their dream school – citing a desire for a school that reflected the diversity of their community, supported the varying talents of their students and had a thorough curriculum.

Kansas City parents are no different from the parents in Los Angeles and New York – they want an educational system that fosters compassion, empathy, and courage along with academic education.

Children’s needs and abilities are supported through the CWC model, as it is the priority of the teachers, parents, and the CWC team to prioritize the education of children in their goals.

Partnerships between the local community and the national network allows for local autonomy and leadership, which defines the specific regional needs.

Dragon feels that to understand why we educate children, educators must understand what an excellent education requires. For CWC, excellent education requires diverse perspectives and representation.

For instance, Citizens of the World has 60% children of color and 50% of children qualify for free or reduced lunch. The racial and economic variations within classrooms prepare children to “entertain all possibilities and realize the potential to others.”

Because the model of CWC fits with the goals of many parents, the demand for the schools is extraordinary – 2,506 applications for 346 seats in Los Angeles and 608 applications for 178 seats in New York.

The future for Citizens of the World Charter Schools looks bright. Currently they are looking for faculty, staff and recruiting parents while they await the CWC in Kansas City charter approval for the site. Continuing to create meaningful connections between students, parents, and teachers will always be foundation of Citizens of the World schools.

Kriste Dragon, as a mother and CEO, wants to leave kids with the insight and knowledge that they know how to work together and make decisions for “the good of the whole, not the good of the many.”

Citizens of the World Charter Schools is dedicated to creating a national network of charter schools that celebrate and reflect the full diversity of their communities, with the goal of preparing students to succeed in our increasingly interconnected, global society and to help them fulfill their potential.

Charlena Wynn is pursuing her Master’s of Arts in Liberal Studies at NC State University with a concentration in examining the construction of Blackness in U.S. museums.
