



Doug Keiller and his daughter Nadia, 4, walk past classrooms during an open house tour of Citizens of the World Mar Vista's temporary location at St. Joan of Arc school in Los Angeles. ED CRISOSTOMO, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

For charter school, new school year brings a new home after controversy

*By Brittany Hanson
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It's a familiar end-of-summer scene: a quick trip to campus to scope out what's in store for the next year. High-fives are exchanged, and "hellos" are shouted down the hall as classrooms are peeked into. That's just the parents.

Ushering them around their new school are the children, who are boisterous in their own right.

The parents of Citizens of the World Mar Vista may be even more pumped for the academic school year start than the kids – and understandably so.

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After months of controversy and uncertainty over a proposal to split the school into two campuses, parents forged an arrangement with the St. Joan of Arc parish in Los Angeles so that all the kids could continue to go to school together in one location.

"We're just so glad to be here," Allison Starkovich said. Starkovich's daughter, Sage, 6, is an incoming first-grader.

Being a world citizen

It's not unusual for parents to have some degree of involvement in their child's education. However, at Citizens of the World Charter, the parents seem to wade in and stay in.

Principal Alison Kerr said almost all the parents will donate time, resources and tools, completely voluntarily, to help set up the school in its new location.

Mar Vista is the youngest of the Citizens of the World Charter group of schools, which work to teach social and emotional mindfulness in addition to the standard curriculum.

The approach "really helps them communicate better, preps them for when life is being adverse," Starkovich said.

Previously, Citizens of the World Mar Vista shared a location with Stoner Elementary School in Del Rey, but had a history of trouble with some of the neighbors there. The *Los Angeles Register* previously reported that there were disagreements over pickup and drop-off traffic at the elementary school location.

Tensions escalated when a campus neighbor, arguing with the family of a Citizens of the World student, flicked a cigarette into the back of a car where a toddler was sitting. Parents also said a charter school employee's vehicle was deliberately rear-ended twice.

In May, Citizens of the World Mar Vista learned that it needed to move. Then in June, the Los Angeles Unified School District said the school could operate out of two Westchester elementary campuses. The charter school accepted the offer to ensure it had a home.

Finally, a parent group put together the one-year partnership with the St. Joan of Arc parish community, keeping the Mar Vista students together.

Peace Corners, tool boxes

Parents said three Citizens of the World teaching concepts have had the biggest impact on their kids: "Cool Toolbox," using a "red, blue or purple voice," and having a "Peace Corner."

"We're just so glad to be here."

- Allison Starkovich
CWC-Mar Vista parent

Peace Corners have been popular at home, parent Alan Elmore said. "They're a place where you go when you need to have a moment – your refuge, when you need to cool off."

Cool Toolbox is a metaphorical skill set where kids use verbal or emotional "tools" to manage social interaction, said parent James Dwyer.

Starkovich, Dwyer and Elmore agreed that the concept of using color-coded voices was one that first struck as "a little different" but has stayed in play at the family home.

"I was irritated about something ... and my daughter said, 'Mom, you're using your purple voice with me - you should use your blue voice,'" Starkovich said.

A blue voice is a calm voice. The red voice is an angry voice, and a purple voice is the in between – getting frustrated, or irritated, when the voice level is slightly raised. Each humorously said they've been lightly scolded by their child for picking the wrong color.

The parents seem pleased their unique school has found a new home, and that their kids will be able to continue to learn together.

"You just want what's best for your kid," Elmore said. "And when it comes down to it, you'll do what it takes to make sure that happens."