VALOR COLLEGIATE
Academies

Foundational Framework

The Valor Foundational Framework provides a balanced set of beliefs, values, disciplines, and community commitments to guide mindset and behavior development among educators and scholars in their roles as teachers, learners, leaders, and members of our community. The framework supports our belief that having a strong culture is critical to developing a high-trust and high-performing school and that building a strong culture happens intentionally. The framework also serves as a declaration of who we are and what we stand for. It represents the culmination of much thought and experience, and offers - we believe - a unique and balanced approach to building a school community. As with any framework, we anticipate that it will grow and change in response to the development and input of our community over time. The framework consists of the following three sections:

Section I: Foundational Beliefs and Values – In this section, we explicitly define the underlying beliefs and embedded values that support the framework, the school design, and our community. We believe it is important to make these beliefs as explicit as possible so that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of who we are and what we stand for.

Section II: The Valor Compass – In this section, we introduce the Valor Compass model, which serves as a guide and metaphor for our approach to learning and growth. The Compass Disciplines, which are contained within the Compass, represent the ideals of individual and communal excellence within our community and serve as guideposts for all we do as a school. Everyone in the community measures their own learning and growth in each of the Compass Disciplines. “Working the Compass” is shorthand for describing the difficult day-to-day work of attainment towards the ideals of the Compass Disciplines.

Section III: The Valor Community Commitments – In this section, we introduce the Valor Commitments, which serve as the primary agreements we make with each other as members of the Valor community. These Commitments guide our three primary responsibilities to improve ourselves, our relationships, and our community. They serve as our moral code.

Section I: Foundational Beliefs and Values

At Valor our central mission is to *empower our diverse community to live inspired, purposeful lives*. Our Foundational Framework is designed to help us live this mission and emerges from the following foundational beliefs and values:

We believe our diversity makes us strong.
We proactively seek to create as diverse a community as possible because we believe in the power of diversity to make us stronger. We recognize that everyone is multi-storied and that no single story about a person or people can tell us about the whole of who they are. We also recognize that power differentials exist in the world and that they exert great influence over our individual and collective stories. We actively seek to correct for this, both in ourselves and in the culture at large, by celebrating alternative storylines that often go unheard. We seek to create a community where every member feels connected to and values their own and others' unique histories, identities, and stories.

> "There is strength in the differences between us, and there is comfort where we overlap."
> *Ani Difranco*

> "I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar."
> *Chimamanda Adichie*

> "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us walk together."
> *Lilla Watson*

We believe that we enroll families, not just scholars.
We believe that children's first, and most important, teachers are their family. We also believe that connection and belonging are two essential needs for a child and seek to be a part of creating a web of support for every scholar we serve. We use the word "family" intentionally to honor the wide range of important adults that play key roles in our scholar's lives. We seek to partner deeply with families and to create a school where their voices are an important part of the shaping of our community and practices. Inside our school, we seek to create a welcoming atmosphere that encourages family members to be an integral part of the learning and community-building process. Outside of the school, we seek to partner with families to "expand the walls of the school" and make lifelong learning a whole family endeavor.

> "Other things may change us, but we start and end with the family."
> *Anthony Brandt*

> "Home is the first school, and parents are the first teachers."
> *T. Berry Brazelton*

We believe that we all deserve the opportunity to fulfill our potential and captain our destinies.
We believe every child deserves a full opportunity to succeed in school and in life and that it is our obligation to empower them with the tools they will need to create the lives they imagine for themselves. We believe that everyone, given the right tools and support, can learn at a high level. To this end, our most fundamental roles as educators are to support scholars to uncover their sense of purpose, define

and embrace their unique values and strengths, and develop the strong work ethics and habits they will need to propel them to academic excellence and well-being. Ultimately, we believe that our job is to empower our scholars to set the course for and set off as the captains of their unique destinies.

> "It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishments the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate,
> I am the captain of my soul."
> *William Ernest Henley*

> "Difficult takes a day. Impossible takes a week."
> *Jay-Z*

We believe that our humanity is found through our relationships with others.
We recognize that there is a healthy tension in everyone's life between their individual needs and the needs of the communities of which they are a part. Balancing these needs successfully is an important part of living a whole and happy life. We draw inspiration from the South African philosophy of Ubuntu, which is loosely translated as meaning "a person is a person through other people." In our schools, we seek to model that our success and well-being is tied directly to the success and well-being of the community as a whole. We also recognize and value the power of relationships as the fundamental building blocks of culture, community, and inspired lives and seek to use our school community as a place to practice building and being in healthy, strong, and meaningful relationships.

> "I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours."
> *Zulu proverb*

> "The story of one life cannot be told separately from the story of other lives. Who are we? The question is not simple. What we call the self is part of a larger matrix of relationship and society. Had we been born to a different family, in a different time, to a different world, we would not be the same. All the lives that surround us are in us."
> *Susan Griffin*

We believe greatness comes from having a growth mindset and that effort, more than talent, matters in the end.
We believe that by collectively adopting the mindset that we are born to get better and are not born with fixed abilities, we will create a community of resilient, lifelong learners who see effort and failure as a necessary part of their never-ending journeys towards success and happiness. We also believe this mindset will allow us the freedom to re-author our self-stories and self-identities in empowering ways. We believe that by freeing ourselves to take risks, we will unleash our ability to tap into our deepest motivations, our wildest creativity, and our most authentic intentions.

> "When the world says, 'Give up,' Hope whispers, 'Try one more time.'"
> *Unknown*

> "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."
> *Thomas Edison*

We believe social justice is everyone's responsibility.
We believe that an important aspect of education is helping initiate young people into society. We believe it is a part of our responsibility, as a school, to create future leaders and citizens who have the

power to advocate for themselves and to make a difference in their communities. We seek to create a school community that deeply values justice and that holds ourselves to the ideal of ending injustice in all of its forms. We believe educational inequality is a civil rights issue of our time and seek to have our school be an important part of a larger movement to bring high-quality, free education to everyone.

> "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
> *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

> "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."
> *Mahatma Gandhi*

We believe excellence is a habit developed through lots and lots and lots of perfect practice.
We believe that those who achieve at the highest level do so because they've developed great habits of heart and mind. We seek to create a community where developing habits through repeated practice is the norm. We also believe that not just any type of practice, but perfect practice, is what leads to excellence. To this end, our community is built around sets of routines and rituals that help to model, teach, and learn the habits of heart and mind that we believe lead to excellence. We hold ourselves to high expectations and believe that through hard work and support we can all achieve greatness together.

> "Time lost is time lost. It's gone forever. Some people tell themselves that they will work twice as hard tomorrow to make up for what they did not do today. People should always do their best. If they work twice as hard tomorrow, then they should have also worked twice as hard today. That would have been their best."
> *John Wooden*

> "It is a mistake to think that the practice of my art has become easy to me. I assure you, dear friend, no one has given so much care to the study of composition as I. There is scarcely a famous master in music whose works I have not frequently and diligently studied."
> *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*

We believe great schools are powered by joy.
We believe that connecting to our deepest values and finding purpose and meaning in all that we do leads to a deep and motivating experience of joy. In our school community, we actively seek to nurture a love of learning in every scholar by helping them connect their learning directly to their lives and their values. As adults, we model this by consciously connecting our work to our values and purpose and by bringing joy into our relationships and the world. We believe it is meaning, purpose, and joy that motivate us to persevere in our pursuit of excellence. We believe that a joyful school environment is something that can be consciously created and that balancing the work and play of progress is essential to true learning.

> "Great minds have purpose, others have wishes. Little minds are tamed and subdued by misfortunes; but great minds rise above them."
> *Washington Irving*

> "Everybody laughs the same in every language."
> *Yakov Smirnoff*

We believe everything can be done with kindness.

We believe that a hallmark of a thriving community is its commitment to kindness. In contrast to many predominant views of kindness in our culture, we view kindness as strength and seek to build our capacity for it in all contexts. We do not separate high expectations, boundary setting, and structure from kindness. In fact, we believe the force behind a successfully structured relationship or school is the force of immovable kindness. We seek to model for our scholars that kindness is always possible and that when we fall short of this ideal, our very commitment to kindness will lead us to doing the necessary repairing and resolving work. We believe kindness emerges from vulnerability and work to create a community that values the courage it requires to be vulnerable, known, and seen.

> “Before you speak, ask yourself these three questions:
> Is it true?
> Is it necessary?
> Is it kind?”
> *Sufi saying*

> "Soft words soften the hearts that are harder than rock, harsh words harden hearts that are softer than silk."
> *Al-Ghazali*

> “We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness.”
> *Charlie Chaplin*

We believe it takes valor to be the best you can be.
We believe that the biggest and most important risks we take in life are the risks to grow. Without this courage to “step into the arena”, no learning or growth is possible. Our namesake, Valor, was chosen because it embodies this primary “courage to be”. The definition of Valor is “the strength of mind or spirit that enables a person to encounter difficulty or danger with firmness; personal bravery.” We live in a complex, often difficult world and we are invited, over and over, to take the easy road, to shutdown, to stop pursuing our dreams, to say, “No, it’s not possible”. At Valor, we seek to create a community with the courage to stand together in the midst of all kinds of uncertainty and continually find the strength to say, together, “Yes!”.

> “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly...”
> *Theodore Roosevelt*

> “Be ignited, or be gone.”
> *Mary Oliver*

Section II: The Valor Compass

Overview

At Valor our mission is to *empower our diverse community to live inspired, purposeful lives*. We believe achieving this mission is only possible if we conceive of our role as a school to be bigger than simply educating minds. For this reason we have intentionally created a model or framework, the Valor Compass, to guide growth and development towards well-being in all aspects of what it means to be human.

The Valor Compass

The Valor Compass is a visual representation and metaphor for the approach we take to development, growth, and learning in the Valor community (see below). The Compass is a rich symbol that has embedded within it dimensions, disciplines, and habits meant to guide development towards an *inner Compass;* a personalized way finding tool. Aspiring to develop, both individually and in relationships, within the broad strokes of these dimensions, and within the finer details of the disciplines and habits, constitutes "Working the Compass".



Compass Dimensions

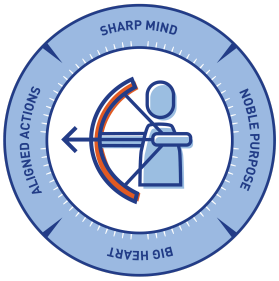
At its broadest level, the Valor Compass is comprised of four basic dimensions: mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. These dimensions are the most fundamental and irreducible aspects of our everyday human experience. We believe that well-being and excellence depend on balanced and integrated mastery in each of these four dimensions.

Compass Disciplines

The Compass Disciplines represent what excellence looks like in each human dimension (see below). The Compass Disciplines are the ideal foci of individual and communal growth within our community and serve as guideposts for all that we do. These disciplines are intentionally aspirational and serve as reminders of who and how we want to be in the world.



The Compass Disciplines work together in the following way: At any moment I can find my True North, balance my Sharp Mind and my Big Heart, draw on my Noble Purpose, and choose to act in a way that is aligned with my best intentions [Aligned Actions]. This process is always available and demonstrates how an *inner Compass* is put to work (see below).



Compass Habits

While we encourage each community member to discover and develop his/her own unique habits of well-being and excellence, we have selected a set of core Compass Habits that we believe are essential to developing an *inner Compass*. These 10 Compass Habits are defined within the Valor Compass, with two Compass Habits corresponding to each of the five disciplines. We define the Compass Habits as Habits of Center (Presence & Balance), Habits of Mind (Curiosity & Diversity of Perspective), Habits of Heart (Courage & Kindness), Habits of Being (Identity & Joy), and Habits of Doing (Determination & Integrity); collectively we refer to these are the core Compass Habits. Below are brief descriptions of the Valor Disciplines and corresponding habits. Definitions of each core Compass Habit are also provided.

True North: Habits of Center



The discipline of True North is represented by the star at the center. At Valor we recognize the foundational importance of **Habits of Center - balance and presence**. We must balance our intentions with our actions, our hearts with our minds, and our individual needs with those of the community. We must also be present with ourselves and others to respond from an aligned place within. Remaining balanced and present requires that we establish a sense of center where we integrate our growth and learning in a conscious way. At Valor, we call this center **True North**. We adopted the term True North from its use in navigation, where it is recognized that finding true north is essential for accurate navigation. We believe this is a powerful metaphor for our lives and we encourage and nurture each person to find and know this center point and to use it to consciously set the direction of their lives.

	**Presence**: A state of awareness defined by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to what is occurring moment-to-moment (inspired by Jon Kabat-Zinn)
	**Balance:** A state of being regulated that creates a sense of inner calm and well-being

Sharp Mind: Habits of Mind



The Compass Discipline of **Sharp Mind** is defined by the pursuit of knowledge and skills, individually, within a group, or within the larger community. This discipline is brought to life through **Habits of Mind - curiosity** and **diversity of perspective**. Honing the discipline of a Sharp Mind requires finding the balance between honoring the multiplicity of perspectives available, while remaining humble about what is still left to be learned.

	**Curiosity:** A state of open-minded, non-judgmental exploration and discovery in pursuit of greater understanding of one's inner experience, relationships, and the world
	**Diversity of Perspective**: The act of seeking multiple perspectives with the understanding that all perspectives are both true and partial, in order to take action to protect and empower oneself and others in the service of social justice

Big Heart: Habits of Heart



The Compass Discipline of **Big Heart** is defined by having the courage to stand in uncertainty, while being kind to one's self and others. Having a Big Heart also means having compassion for one's self, the needs of others, and the world at large, and garnering the courage to step in to be a part of the solution. This discipline is brought to life through **Habits of Heart - courage** and **kindness**.

	**Courage**: A state defined by appropriate risk-taking and embrace of one's worthiness in the face of vulnerability
	**Kindness:** A state of gentle, supportive, and generous engagement with oneself and others, rooted in basic, human goodness, and in pursuit of deeper connection and awareness

Noble Purpose: Habits of Being



The Compass Discipline of **Noble Purpose** is defined by being connected to one's deepest values, living from one's preferred and authored self-story, and sourcing joy from living this story in the world. This discipline is brought to life through **Habits of Being - Joy** and **Identity**. Honing the discipline of Noble Purpose requires finding the balance between remaining doggedly connected to one's purpose, while allowing one's self to be impulsively joyful.

	**Joy**: A state of full immersion - with full focus, involvement, and enjoyment - in an activity that is aligned with one's deepest values; a form of inner interpretation of events that leads to willing engagement in the full range of life experiences
	**Identity:** A value-based self-story and meaning-making framework that drives thought, emotion, and action

Aligned Actions: Habits of Doing



The Compass Discipline of **Aligned Actions** is defined by working steadfastly towards action/intention alignment, being engaged and supportive of one's community, and showing a willingness to contribute, through actions, to the greater good. This Compass Discipline is brought to life through **Habits of Doing - determination** and **integrity**. Honing this discipline requires finding a balance between achieving at one's highest level while remaining true to one's deepest values.

	**Determination:** The habit of "sustained passion for a particular long-term goal or endstate, coupled with a powerful motivation to achieve that objective" (Angela Duckworth)
	**Integrity**: A state of inner alignment between values and action that leads to a sense of wholeness and authenticity

The Valor Compass in Context

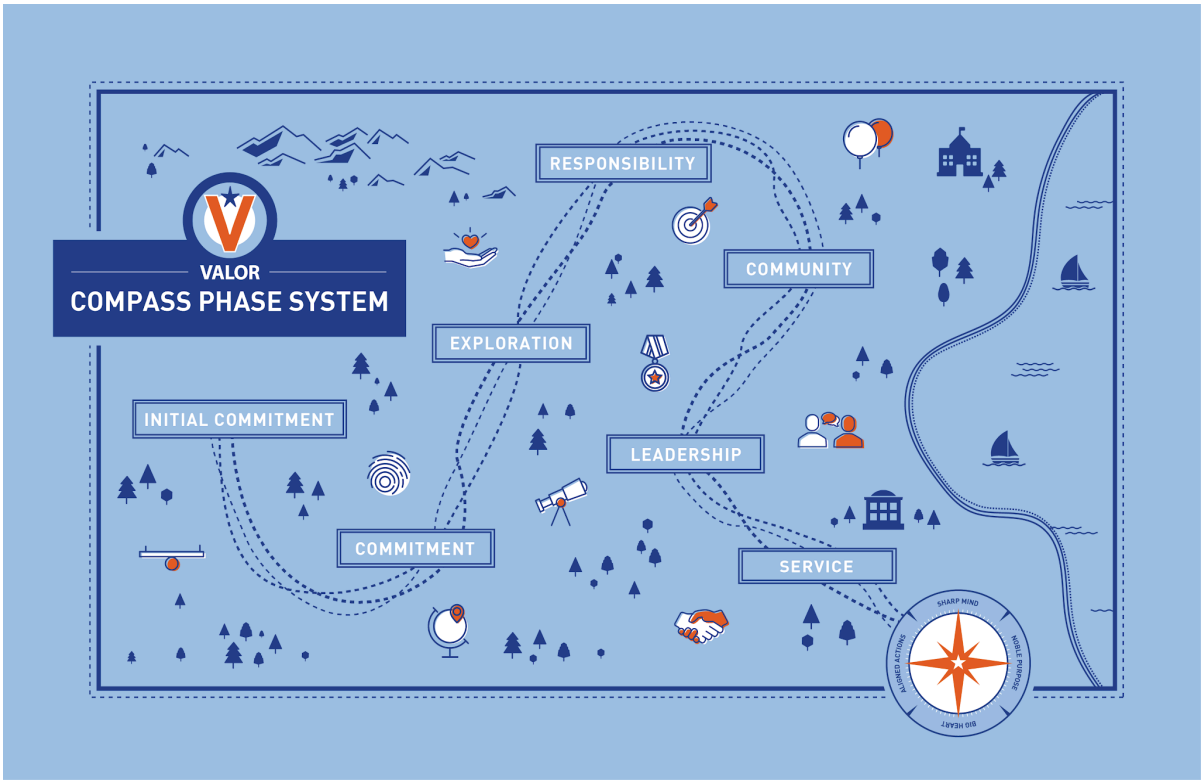
We recognize that everyone at Valor exists within multiple communities. The communities in which we reside, learn, heal, and play can be considered our contexts. The Valor Compass, and resulting *inner Compass*, is a tool to be used "in service of" and within various contexts. A person's *inner Compass* can be used in service of academics (i.e., Compass-in-Academics), relationships (i.e., Compass-in-Relationships), athletics (i.e., Compass-in-Motion), social justice, college-readiness, and any other major life context. Each of these contexts may call forth additional necessary habits and mindsets. We intentionally define and develop some of the core Compass Habits in several of these contexts as well.

Working the Compass: Compass Phase System and Circle

Inner compass-building is a lifelong endeavor. However, at Valor, the continual process of developing and refining ourselves over time takes place by "working the Compass". For scholars this takes place along a 5th - 12th grade trajectory and for faculty this takes place year-to-year.

Compass Phase System

Working the Compass individually happens through the Compass phase system (see below). The Compass phase system is comprised of a variety of developmental phases that outline one's development in each discipline of the Valor Compass. Collectively these phases make up the Compass phase system. In 5th grade scholars enter the Initial Commitment Phase and through a competency-based, self-directed, and gradual release model, continue working the Compass all the way through the Service Phase. Each phase provides opportunities to do phase work, or participate in signature experiences, for each of the five Compass Disciplines. Leaders within each phase "unlock" privileges within the community. Scholars with a deep sense of agency are recognized and celebrated. Scholars who have not yet developed such a robust sense of agency are supported and guided by these leaders and by their mentors. Samples of the phase system, phase work can be found here. One of the primary places where scholars do phase work is in Compass Class.



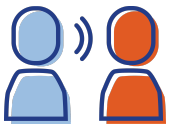
Circle

Working the Compass communally happens primarily through the practice of Circle (see below). Circle is a value-based, community development approach for self-understanding and organizational development and is a mechanism to catalyze a commitment to growth. It represents a group of people who are committed to pushing themselves and each other to be exemplary as individuals, in relationships, and in the community. Phase work, described above, is completed individually by scholars and faculty and engaged with in Circle. All faculty participate in faculty Circles and mentors facilitate scholar Circles. The Circle participants bring the content of Circle via "Circle work" for a rich, collective experience. A more detailed description of the Circle practice can be found here.



Section III: The Valor Commitments

These commitments serve as the primary agreements we make with each other as members of the community, which guide our three primary responsibilities to improve ourselves, our relationships, and our community. They serve as our moral code. The Valor commitments are below.

	**Be Safe.** **1. I commit to keeping myself and others safe.** This commitment embodies our deep belief that learning and growth can only happen when we feel safe. As members of the Valor community, we expect everyone to commit to being physically and emotionally safe, to living lives of integrity, to being thoughtful with regard to their actions and their impact on others, and to being actively protective of their own and others' well being.
	**Be Inclusive.** **2. I commit to leaving no community member behind.** This commitment embodies our belief in the South African principle of Ubuntu – that our individual well-being and success is connected to the well-being and success of the community as a whole. This commitment means being compassionate, being conscientious, and being connected to a vision and purpose that is larger than our own.
	**3. I commit to seeking diversity of perspective.** This commitment represents our fundamental belief in and commitment to diversity. This commitment asks us to be curious, to be open-minded, to be flexible in our thinking, to be inclusive, and to be multi-storied in our self- and other- understanding.
	**Be Kind.** **4. I commit to speaking to the person, not about the person.** This commitment represents our belief in the power of transparency and protects us, as a community, against the poison of gossip. The commitment reminds us to be direct, to be conscientious, to be prudent, to be supportive, and to be courageous in our communications.

	**5. I commit to speaking from my heart, but using my head.** This commitment embodies our core belief that everything can be done with kindness and reminds us that while it is important to access and express our thoughts, feelings, and needs, that the most effective and wise way to do this is in a manner that will ensure that our communication can be heard and understood.
	**Work Hard.** **6. I commit to working the Compass.** This commitment embodies our belief in working hard, in practicing, and in striving for excellence. It also reminds us to stay in balance and to attend to all of the dimensions of our growth.
	**Be Accountable.** **7. I commit to walking my talk.** This commitment represents our belief in trust as a foundational aspect of a strong community and calls us to be honest and trustworthy, to live with integrity, and to ensure that our actions and their impact align with our intentions.
	**Be Brave.** **8. I commit to showing up with Valor.** This commitment embodies our belief that it takes great courage to grow and reminds us to take risks daily, to be vulnerable, to bring an open heart into all situations, and to live out our purpose.