WHOLE CHILD MODEL

Van Ness Elementary, a DCPS School

The Whole Child Model integrates multiple tiers of support throughout the school day to build a safe and supportive school climate as well as the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills young children need to regulate their emotions, manage stress, and handle conflicts productively.

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OVERVIEW

The Whole Child Model makes students' socio-emotional growth foundational to everything a school does. It is a trauma-informed, social-emotional learning model rooted in an understanding that children's academic success is inextricably linked to their overall well-being, and in the belief that we can—and must—attend to the development of the whole child. The model helps students build the intra- and inter-personal skills they need to regulate their emotions, manage stress, and handle conflicts productively. It does this through a multi-tier system of supports that together develop a safe and warm school environment for everyone—including students and their families.

The Whole Child Model is currently implemented in over 30 schools across Washington D.C., Texas, and Tennessee. Students in Whole Child Model classes demonstrated significant growth in various social-emotional factors such as perseverance, social awareness, and self-efficacy. Free resource toolkits, as well as some Cohort Learning Communities, are available to schools interested in implementing the Whole Child Model. ▸Whole Child Model SEL Video

## What Makes This Model Innovative?

Whole-Child Focus
The Whole Child Model supports students physically, socially,emotionally, and cognitively; it fosters important student skills and mindsets as well as an overall culture of well-being.

Connection & Community
The Whole Child Model focuses on building trusting, caring relationships between students and adults, as well as between students and their peers.
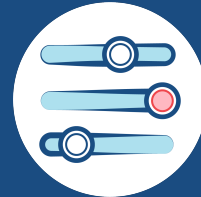
Customization
The Whole Child Model personalizes well-being because each child is different. The model provides tier 2 and 3 interventions to support students who need additional tailored supports.

DESIGN

Goals

The Whole Child Model is designed to develop character traits students need to learn and thrive.

Compassion	Students are kind to and show empathy for others in the school, community, and world.
Cross-Cultural Community Building	Students value and seek diverse experiences and viewpoints. They work well with others across lines of difference.
Constant Learning	Students look for opportunities to improve their own practice and the world around them. They see obstacles as a chance to grow.

Experience

The Whole Child Model creates a safe, warm learning environment conducive to social, emotional, and academic learning through a multi-tiered system of supports: CARE provides all learners with Tier 1 support, while Boost ensures there is Tier 2 and Tier 3 support for the ~20% of learners likely to need them. Family Circle builds trusting relationships with all families, empowering them to be valued partners in education and ensuring students have what they need for success.

CARE

CARE (Compassion & Assertiveness, Routines, Environment) is the set of school-wide practices that create a safe, connected, and predictable environment where students feel valued, learn to self-regulate, and work in ways that help them meet individual and class goals. When these Tier 1 practices are in place, students are largely able to engage in learning, and the need for additional intervention is significantly reduced. 📑 CARE Overview

CARE includes three components:

Compassion & Assertiveness – Through the use of intentional language and tone as well as a responsive and predictable behavior system, adults build trusting relationships with students and consistently model, teach, and practice the skills they most want young people to learn. Strategies include Maintaining Composure, Language of Safety (proactive and responsive), Language of Empathy, and Language of Community and Learning.

- **Maintaining Composure** in times of stress, especially when responding to students' challenging behavior or big feelings can be challenging but is critical to building trust. 📑 Maintaining Composure Guide
- **Language of Safety** is used to make sure children know what is expected and to support them in meeting those expectations. 📑 Language of Safety Guide
- **Language of Empathy** is used to respond to children's strong emotions and build relational connections with students. 📑 Language of Empathy Guide
- **Language of Community & Learning** contributes to connections between members of the classroom community as well as promoting children's learning. 📑 Language of Community & Learning Guide

Routines – Consistent routines are used to foster safety, explicitly teach and practice SEL skills, give students greater ownership of the class, and free up mental energy to focus on learning. Strategies include Strong Start Morning Routine, Classroom Jobs, Social Stories, Visual Expectations, and more.

- **Strong Start** is a set of rituals and routines that get students ready to learn by fostering a sense of safety, belonging, community, and self-efficacy. Strong Start begins with teachers greeting students individually at the door of the classroom. ▶Greetings Students then have breakfast in the classroom and engage in independent work. Lastly, students participate in Group Routine, which has four key parts: Purposeful Partnering, Community Building, Breathe & Focus, and Goal Setting. 📑 Strong Start Guide

- ○ **Purposeful Partnering** is a ritual that fosters peer connection between all students through an engaging partner activity. ▶Purposeful Partnering
- ○ **Community Building** is a whole class ritual that fosters community by giving students a shared joyful experience. ▶Community Building
- ○ **Breathe & Focu**s teaches strategies for self-regulation, including deep breathing, meditative moments, and full-body stretches. ▶Breathe & Focus
- ○ **Goal-setting,** is when students set a daily goal for living out the classroom agreements.
  - ■ **Classroom Jobs** allow every student to be responsible for the well-being of an aspect of the classroom community. 📑 Classroom Jobs Guide
  - ■ **Consistent Routines** are predictable structures and routines that maximize student autonomy while supporting students' physical and emotional safety, such as social stories and visual expectations. 📑 Consistent Routines Guide

Environment – Thoughtful overall classroom design creates environments that are warm and welcoming; are owned by students; minimize stimuli that may overwhelm or trigger students; and meet students' physical, academic, social, and emotional needs. Strategies include Classroom Design and Centering Space.
- ■ **Classroom Design** must be welcoming, inclusive, and designed to support children's academic, social, emotional, and physical needs. 📑 Classroom Design Guide ▶ Classroom Tour
- ■ **Centering Space** is a designated area of the classroom that students can access to support their emotional self-regulation. Students may use the Centering Space when they are calling for love or help (e.g., feeling overwhelmed). The area features cozy seating, tools to help students calm down, resources to help students identify their feelings, and a variety of activities to help students bring their brains into the executive state. 📑Centering Space Guide

Boost

The Whole Child Model recognizes that some students will need a "Boost" in order to thrive. Boosts are personalized Tier 2 and 3 interventions for students who need additional tailored support. Boosts include classroom interventions that teachers can use directly, as well as proactive group therapies and individual interventions used outside the classroom. Boosts are provided based on an analysis of a child's behavior and their history of trauma. 📑 Boost Overview

Boost includes three components:

- **Increased Support** – The Whole Child Model increases support for children who—through their past experiences at school, observed challenges early in the school year, or personal trauma histories—show that they may benefit from a deeper sense of safety and connection at school. These early supports often alleviate the need for tailored interventions. Strategies include CARE Plus Classroom Strategies, New Student Orientation, and TLC (Time, Love, Connection). CARE Plus Guide New Student Orientation Guide TLC Guide
- **Immediate Response** – When students communicate through extreme behaviors, schools must respond in ways that maintain safety for everyone. A non-punitive system develops safety, connection, and replacement skills, so that students can succeed in the future. Strategies include Structured Recess and Restorative In-School Suspension. Structured Recess Guide Restorative In-School Suspension Guide
- **Tailored Intervention** – Students who have difficulty feeling safe and connected after sustained efforts will need additional tailored support. Teachers collect ABC data and collaborate through the RTI process to determine the most effective intervention for each student. Strategies include de-escalation strategies, child-specific strategies, therapeutic groups, and other evidence-based programs.

Family Circle

The Whole Child Model's Family Engagement Mission is: "Families from all backgrounds are valued and feel safe contributing to children's growth and development as equal partners in education." To meet this mission, the model includes a Family Circle composed of a student's school and home family. They believe that building this circle is critical to support a child's full development.

Family Circle can be broken down into five components:

- **Proactive Relationship-Building** – Each student's family receives at least one home visit, or equivalent, during the summer to build authentic relationships outside of school. Highest need students are prioritized for early and potentially multiple opportunities. Proactive Relationship-Building Guide
- **Ongoing, Two-Way Communication** – Communication is proactive, two-way, and both school-wide and individualized. The school leader sends predictable, weekly communication that acts as a conduit for school-wide information. Teachers communicate with families using texts, app messaging, weekly newsletters, and class websites. Families have easy ways to give feedback, ask questions, or give input to the classroom teacher and to school administration. Ongoing, Two-Way Communication Guide
- **Family-to-Family Community Building** – Family events, sponsored by the school, parent-teacher organization (PTO), and community groups, are held at least one a month

with the goal of building connection and community between families. 📑Family-to-Family Community Building Guide

- **Academic Partnering** – Teachers talk with families about their child's academic goals. Pre-K to 1st grade students engage in goal- and data-driven parent conferences. Second to fifth grades hold student-led conferences, and their families engage in Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT) meetings twice each year after an initial conference. 📑Academic Partnering Guide

- **Additional Support** – Trusting relationships with families enable the school to provide or connect families to support in times of need. This often includes supports from the school psychologist, social worker, other staff, or the PTO. 📑Additional Support Guide

Supporting Structures

The model can be integrated into a school's existing overall design but will require some shifts to the daily schedule and physical space, extensive adult training, and possible shifts in a school approach to family partnerships and school culture.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

The Whole Child Model does not entail a specific curriculum or instructional framework, so it can be integrated into what a school already has in place.

The Whole Child Model does not utilize a specific curriculum. As a result, it can work alongside a variety of social-emotional and academic curricula a school may already use. Similarly, the model does not entail the use of a single overall instructional framework. However, *it is important that the instructional model, or models, used by a school integrate well with the practices involved in the Whole Child Model.* For example, the intentional language and tone used as part of CARE should be integrated seamlessly into all teachers' instructional moves to ensure adults are supporting students' socio-emotional health and learning.

ADULT ROLES, HIRING, & LEARNING

All staff must believe in their ability to influence student well-being through every interaction. The staff culture must be one in which adults feel safe, valued, loved, and supported.

It is important to be intentional about hiring team members. Teachers, the custodial team, front office staff, and everyone in between should share a *belief in the importance of student well-being and in their ability to influence that through every interaction.* This requires using rituals that cultivate this type of staff culture, scoping roles to reflect the understanding of teachers' strengths and to make the work sustainable, giving staff meaningful leadership responsibilities, and recognizing staff members as full humans.

Student schedules must have dedicated time for wellness routines and activities.

Schedules start with a schoolwide commitment to greeting every child at the door and to supporting students who may be coming in with a rough start. Every classroom starts with a Strong Start, and this time is held sacred for each class.

Beyond those essential morning routines, creating an environment in which students thrive involves every part of the student experience—it cannot be confined to a single part of the day. The model schedules in a way that supports the whole child by considering students' need for choice, movement, and food throughout the day. For example, teachers proactively schedule movement breaks in addition to their recess time. Younger grades have two recess blocks per day and recess precedes lunch. Within the classroom, students work in different settings (on the carpet, in stations around the room, at desks or tables) for shorter blocks, typically no more than 30 minutes at a time, to allow for periods of sustained work balanced with regular movement.

SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

Close partnerships with families are critical to ensuring consistency at home and school.

When students receive consistent support and guidance at school and at home, they are more likely to internalize the habits schools teach. The model works to build proactive, positive relationships with families, communicate regularly, and support families to learn more about the strategies used in school.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The physical space must be intentionally designed to be trauma-responsive and welcoming.

The physical environment sends a strong message about whether a person is safe and welcome in a space. This requires taking great care in maintaining a clean and organized space, making sure students and families are represented and have ownership of the space (through photos, artwork, etc), and making sure materials are accessible.

The model recommends using trauma-responsive guidelines to consider colors and layout to avoid common triggers, when possible.

SPACE & FACILITIES

Operational strategies and investments must reflect prioritization of student well-being.

School operations must support the desired culture. The operations team must work with families and staff in a way that helps them feel valued, and collect feedback on procedures to make sure they meet the needs of the community members. This requires getting input on the budget and investing in partnerships that support staff and student well-being and add capacity in strategic ways.

BUDGET & OPERATIONS

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

Transcend currently houses the Whole Child Model and the following supports to help you implement their model.

Whole Child Model Website
Free

The Whole Child Model offers a wide range of free, open source resource toolkits on its website. These include descriptions of the various pieces of the model, implementation and quick start guides, and a wide range of videos showing specific practices.

Access Now

Whole Child Collaborative
Cost Associated

The Whole Child Model offers the Whole Child Collaborative, a regional cohort learning community for districts to learn about the model, build the conditions to implement it, and strategically adapt it to work well in each unique context.

Get in Touch

Custom Partnership
Cost Associated

The Whole Child Model also provides one-on-one coaching and consultation for schools that wish to adopt the model in a different timeline or region from the cohort learning community.

Get in Touch

Reach

Impact

Panorama Student Survey data revealed that students in classes piloting the Whole Child Model demonstrated significant growth in various social emotional factors such as perseverance, social awareness, and self-efficacy. The growth of students in pilot classrooms exceeded that of students in non-pilot classrooms, suggesting that the model had positive effects on students' SEL competencies. 📑 Transcend and Van Ness Elementary School, 2021
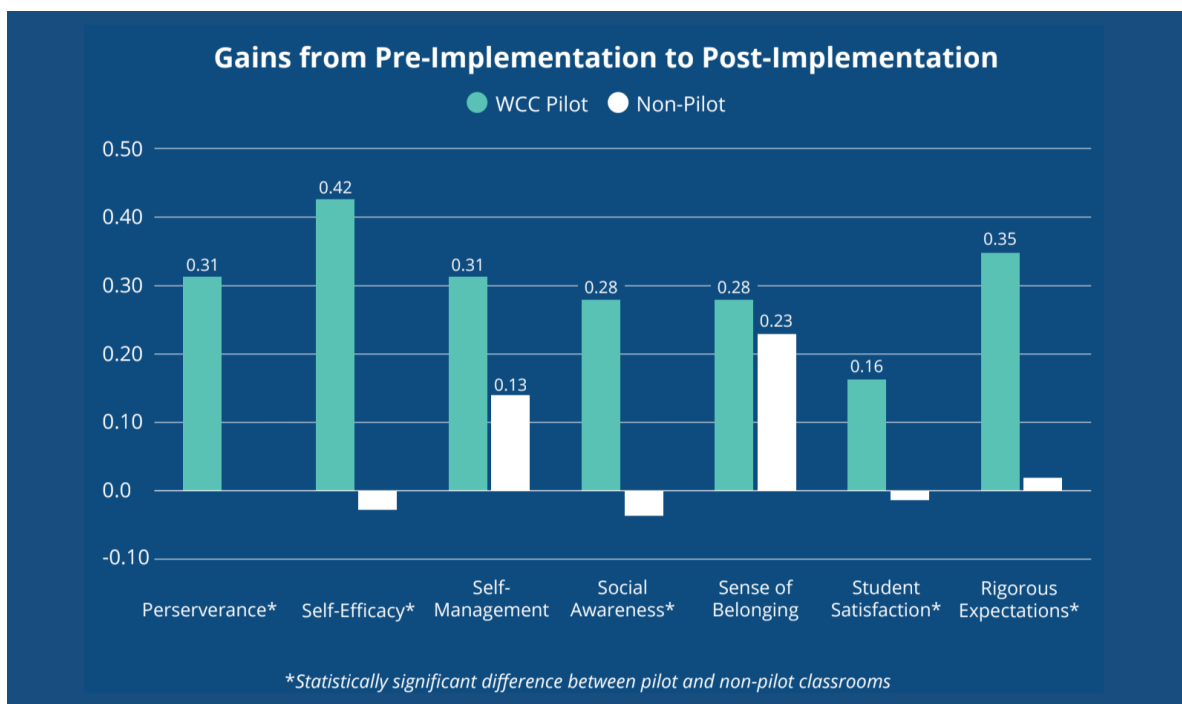
At the founding school, Van Ness Elementary, where the Whole Child Model is combined with a rigorous academic model, results are promising. 📑 Transcend and Van Ness Elementary School, 2021

- Van Ness Elementary outperformed DCPS elementary schools on all SEL measurements on

the Panorama index.
- ■ Van Ness Elementary's early childhood classrooms scored the highest in the city on all domains of CLASS, a research-based assessment that has shown a link between classroom scores and academic achievement
- ■ Van Ness Elementary scored 98% student satisfaction and 95% parent satisfaction on the Panorama index.

Contact
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RESOURCES

Whole Child Model SEL Video
An overview of the Whole Child Model at Van Ness to support SEL and wellness.

CARE Overview
An overview of CARE, the set of school-wide practices that create a safe, connected environment for children and adults.

Maintaining Composure Guide
A guide to help you implement Maintaining Composure, including an overview of the strategy and how it fits with other practices in the Whole Child Model.

Language of Safety Guide

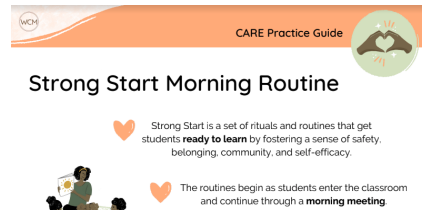**Language of Empathy Guide**

Language of Community &

A guide to help you implement Language of Safety, including an overview of the strategy and how it fits with other practices in the Whole Child Model.

A guide to help you implement Language of Empathy, including an overview of the strategy and how it fits with other practices in the Whole Child Model.

Learning Guide
A guide to help you implement Language of Community and Learning, including an overview of the strategy and how it fits with other practices in the Whole Child Model.

Greetings Video
A video showing an example of Greetings in a 2nd grade class at Van Ness Elementary.

Strong Start Morning Routine Guide
A guide to help you implement Strong Start, including an overview of the strategy and details for each part of the routine.

Purposeful Partnering Video
A video showing an example of Purposeful Partnering in a 2nd grade class at Van Ness Elementary.
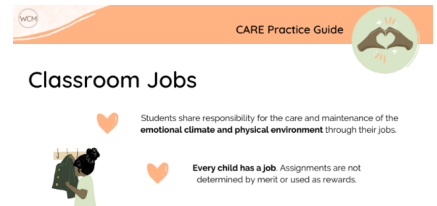

Community Building Video
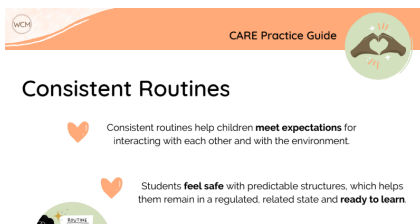A video showing an example of Community Building in a 2nd grade class at Van Ness Elementary.

Breathe & Focus Video
A video showing an example of Community Building in a pre-k class at Van Ness Elementary.

Classroom Jobs Guide
A guide to help you implement Classroom Jobs, including an overview of the strategy and a checklist to get started.

Consistent Routines Guide
A guide to help you implement Consistent Routines, including

Classroom Design Guide
A guide to help you implement Classroom Design, including

Classroom Tour (2nd grade)
A video tour of a 2nd-grade classroom at Van Ness

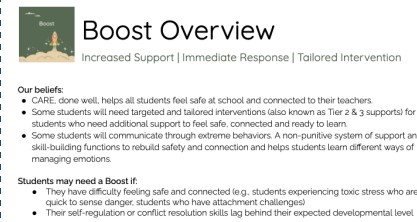an overview of the strategy and a checklist to get started.

an overview of the strategy and a checklist to get started.

Elementary with Aly and Magen, who explain how they designed the physical space to be trauma-responsive and welcoming.

[Centering Space Guide](#)
A guide to help you implement Centering Space, including an overview of the strategy and essential components.

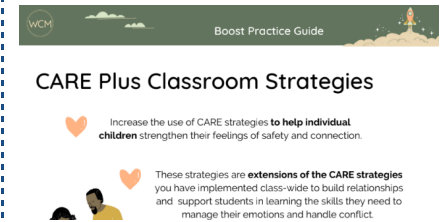[Boost Overview](#)
An overview of Boost, which provides additional tailored supports for children who need them.
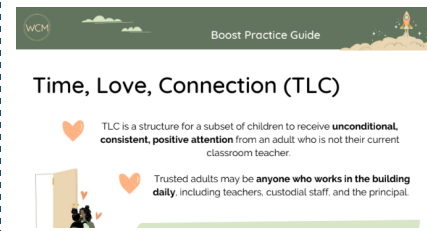

[CARE Plus Guide](#)

A guide to help you implement CARE Plus Classroom Strategies, including an overview of the strategy and a checklist to get started.
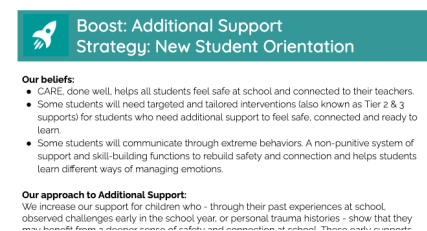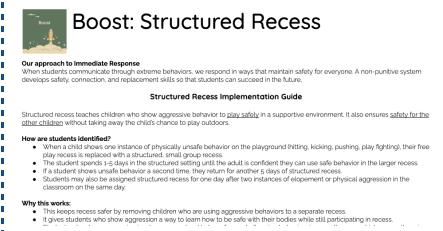

[New Student Orientation Guide](#)
A guide to help you implement New Student Orientation, including an overview of the approach, rationale, and planning steps.

[TLC Guide](#)

A guide to help you implement TLC, including an overview of the strategy and how it fits with other practices in the Whole Child Model.

[Structured Recess Guide](#)
A guide to help you implement Structured Recess, including an overview of the approach, rationale, and planning steps.
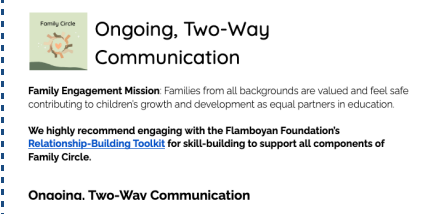

[Restorative In-School Suspension Guide](#)
A guide to help you implement Restorative In-School

[Proactive Relationship-Building Guide](#)
A guide to help you implement Proactive

[Ongoing, Two-Way Communication Guide](#)
A guide to help you implement Ongoing, Two-Way

Suspension, including an overview of the approach, rationale, and planning steps.	Relationship-Building, including an overview of the practice, rationale, and resources.	Communication, including an overview of the practice, rationale, and resources.
Family to Family Community-Building **Family Engagement Mission**: Families from all backgrounds are valued and feel safe contributing to children's growth and development as equal partners in education. **We highly recommend engaging with the Flamboyan Foundation's Relationship-Building Toolkit for skill-building to support all components of Family Circle.** **Family to Family Community-Building** [Family-to-Family Community Building Guide](#) A guide to help you implement Family-to-Family Community Building, including an overview of the practice, rationale, and resources.	**Academic Partnering** **Family Engagement Mission**: Families from all backgrounds are valued and feel safe contributing to children's growth and development as equal partners in education. **We highly recommend engaging with the Flamboyan Foundation's Relationship-Building Toolkit for skill-building to support all components of Family Circle.** **Academic Partnering** [Academic Partnering Guide](#) A guide to help you implement Academic Partnering, including an overview of the practice, rationale, and resources.	**Additional Support** **Family Engagement Mission**: Families from all backgrounds are valued and feel safe contributing to children's growth and development as equal partners in education. **We highly recommend engaging with the Flamboyan Foundation's Relationship-Building Toolkit for skill-building to support all components of Family Circle.** **Additional Support** [Additional Support Guide](#) A guide to help you implement Additional Support, including an overview of the practice, rationale, and resources.
DESIGNING SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT THE WHOLE CHILD: A Story of Partnership Researched and Written by Emily Liebtag August 2021 [Designing Schools to Support the Whole Child: A Story of Partnership](#) A case study about designing, codifying and spreading of the Whole Child Model through a partnership between Van Ness Elementary, a DCPS school, and Transcend.		