

# The WE Schools Foundational Module

*Creating caring classrooms by bringing social and emotional learning together with service-learning*



AN INITIATIVE OF



MADE POSSIBLE BY



A RECOMMENDED EDUCATOR FOUNDATIONAL MODULE FOR THE WE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

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# Welcome,

Thank you for implementing the WE Schools Foundational Module in your classroom. By taking part, you are showing the world that building caring and supportive learning environments enables students of all ages to create positive change and promote well-being.

The purpose of this module is to provide educators with a sequenced approach to develop supportive instructional practices, build positive relationships and create safe and caring environments that foster student engagement and learning. This module helps to set a strong base from which students can engage meaningfully in service-learning to explore problems in their school and community, develop plans to solve them, and take action, and reflect upon their impact.

Research has shown that when students feel that they belong at school and in their community, they are better engaged, are better able to achieve their learning goals and can nurture their well-being. This research highlighting the importance of student connection informed the development of the Foundational Module in order to help educators create caring classroom communities that foster students' sense of belonging. We believe that the best learning experiences come from a place of safety, care and support, and we recommend implementing this module at the beginning of the school year to kick off your WE Schools journey on the right foot.

Thank you for your dedication and passion to empowering students to create positive change.

Dr. Molly Stewart Lawlor, Ph.D.



## **Dr. Molly Stewart Lawlor, Ph.D.**

**Lead Advisor on Social-Emotional Learning and Primary Author of the WE Schools Foundational Module**

Molly Stewart Lawlor is the primary author of the WE Well-being program and has expertise in social and emotional development throughout childhood and adolescence. Molly is working with the WE Schools team to ensure that that social-emotional learning aligns with the outcomes, objectives and service-learning framework with WE.

# What Is WE Schools?

WE Schools is an innovative series of experiential service-learning programs that engage educators and youth globally to empower them with the skills, knowledge and motivation to bring positive change in themselves and the world. It's designed to follow four steps that challenge students to dive deeper into critical social issues: Investigate and Learn, Action Plan, Take Action, and Report and Celebrate.



## Steps of WE Schools

### 1. Investigate and Learn

Explore local and global issues then set your goal.

### 2. Action Plan

Develop an action plan for your initiative.

### 3. Take Action

Implement your plan and reflect on your impact.

### 4. Report and Celebrate

Present the results of your project.



### Record and Reflect

Take time to record and reflect on your progress and impact during each of the four steps of WE Schools. After completing each campaign, contact your WE Schools Program Manager to fill out an Impact Survey.

# The Foundational Module

The WE Schools Foundational Module helps teachers create an inclusive and supportive environment that will help nurture students' sense of belonging, fostering a caring classroom community for student engagement and learning. It sets the stage for students to take part in the WE Schools service-learning program, giving them the space and opportunity to explore issues, develop plans for solving those issues and take action.

In four foundational lessons that use a student-directed approach, this module follows the four-step process of the WE Schools service-learning framework: Investigate, Action Plan, Take Action and Report and Celebrate. It not only provides a base for the WE Schools program but also serves as a catalyst for students' development and growth.



# Building a Foundation Together

This module is built on social-emotional learning and service-learning, providing students with the skills to become caring, respectful and responsible citizens and the opportunities to apply those skills and values. When students have the foundation and support they need to become active agents of change, anything is possible for them.

## Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning is a way of learning through which individuals gain the skills and knowledge to identify and manage their emotions, understand different perspectives, show empathy for others, set and achieve positive goals, develop and sustain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Social-emotional skills include relationship-building, self-awareness, self-recognition, self-management, social awareness and decision-making. To address the changing needs of today's and tomorrow's students, social-emotional learning is becoming increasingly important since it supports academic learning and promotes well-being.



## Service-Learning

Service-learning is an approach to learning that engages students to address the needs of their community while meeting their learning objectives. Teachers guide classrooms through broader academic discussions and enable students to learn about the local, national and global issues, and become agents of change. When classroom learning and meaningful service intersect, students are able to develop a stronger understanding of issues, while engaging in actions that help make a difference, each experience reinforcing the other.



# Tips for Nurturing a Supportive Space

There are many ways that you can nurture a supportive space for your students. Here are some ideas to get you started.

**Greet students at the beginning of the day and say goodbye at the end of the day.**

**Use restorative practices for discipline.**

**Offer students choices in their learning activities.**

**Consider the physical set up of the room, such as grouping students together rather than rows of desks.**

**Offer opportunities for students to voice their opinions.**

**Set up a buddy class to offer students leadership and mentoring opportunities.**

# Creating a Caring Classroom

There are five lessons in this module that reflect the four steps of WE Schools with a concluding reflection lesson to help students recap what they've learned.

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>LESSON 1</b> | <b>Get Started</b><br>Engage students in discussion on what “community” means and how to create a caring, supportive learning environment. |
| <b>LESSON 2</b> | <b>Investigate and Learn</b><br>Students explore ideas about what makes a caring classroom environment.                                    |
| <b>LESSON 3</b> | <b>Action Plan</b><br>Help students plan initiatives to create their own caring classroom structure.                                       |
| <b>LESSON 4</b> | <b>Take Action</b><br>Support students as they put their plans into action.  |
| <b>LESSON 5</b> | <b>Reflect</b><br>Guide students in reflecting on their work.  |

## LESSON 1

# Get Started

## *Learning About Community*

### Purpose

Engage students in an active discussion on what they feel is required to create a caring, supportive learning environment. This will help set your classroom up as a safe place and ensure all students feel included and empowered to succeed in class.

### Objective

Students will investigate and learn about the meaning of “community,” reflect on what a caring community looks like for themselves and hear each other’s perspective on what contributes to a caring classroom community.

#### Estimated Time

- 30 to 40 minutes

#### Skills Learned

- Critical Thinking
- Communication Skills
- Reflection Skills

#### Materials

- Dice (1 per pair of students)
- Chart paper
- Markers
- SMARTboard or white/chalkboard

## PART 1

# Introduction to WE Schools

Explain to your students that as a class, you'll be working together to create a classroom where we all feel we belong. They will all have a chance to share their ideas and take action to create the kind of classroom they can all enjoy and feel safe in.

## PART 2 (OPTIONAL)

# Ice-breaker Activity

The purpose of this group activity is to encourage students to relate to one another and build stronger bonds between them. They will identify similarities with each other and improve group cohesion in the classroom. Choose one of the following warm-up activities:

### **Activity: Pleased to Meet You**

1. Pair up students (if possible, pair students who do not usually work together).
2. Write six get-to-know-you questions on the board. Here are some examples but feel free to come up with your own questions:
  - What's your favorite \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., food, game, book, etc.)?
  - What's something that makes you laugh?
  - What's something you like to do outside of school?
  - What's something that makes you frustrated?
  - Who lives in your house (pets included)?
  - What school subject is easiest/hardest for you?
3. Ask students to introduce themselves and take turns rolling a die. Then, they will answer the question that corresponds to the number they rolled, answering two to three questions in total.
4. Bring the class back together and have each student introduce the other by sharing one interesting fact about them.

### Activity: Would You Rather

1. Ask students a “would you rather” question (either read aloud or written on the board) and designate two sides of the room for each answer. Feel free to come up with your own questions or use the following examples:
  - Would you rather be able to fly or be invisible?
  - Would you rather only eat your two favorite foods for the rest of your life or never eat them again?
  - Would you rather be the teacher or the student?
  - Would you rather make lots of money or love your job?
  - Would you rather live in a cave or a treehouse?
  - Check out [conversationstartersworld.com/would-you-rather-questions](https://www.conversationstartersworld.com/would-you-rather-questions) for more examples.
2. Once students have chosen their answer, they will move to the designated side of the room and discuss with their peers who have chosen the same option.
3. After a brief discussion, invite students to share their opinion with the class and facilitate a friendly debate between the two sides.



**PART 3**

# What Is a Community Discussion

Using the following guiding questions, lead the class in a discussion about the concept of community. Invite students to share their ideas and write them on the board or post sticky notes on a piece of chart paper. Through this exercise, students can access and share their previous knowledge about the subject while expanding their understanding of it.

1. Ask students: What is a community?
2. Invite students to write down their ideas using words, phrases or images.
3. After two to three minutes of quiet time, ask students to turn to someone around them to share their ideas.
4. Write the word “community” on the board or chart paper and have students add their ideas. Make sure to give an option for students to opt out of sharing. Then group ideas into themes.
5. Provide the following definition of the word “community” on the board:
  - The Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes a community as “a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society.”
6. Ask students the following questions using the Popcorn Strategy/Share, a collaborative way to engage all students to share their ideas with each other by going around the class:
  - How does this definition relate to our classroom?
  - What do we have in common?
  - Why are we all here?
  - What is our purpose as a community?

**Eventually, the class will work toward the goal of agreeing that,  
“We are here to learn together!”**

## PART 4

# Caring Community Brainstorm

1. As a class, brainstorm what a “caring classroom” would look and sound like. Invite students to share their ideas through the Popcorn Strategy/Share and record answers on chart paper or another medium where they can refer back to in the next lesson.
2. Ask students what the word “caring” means. Have students share their ideas. After a brief discussion, explain that it means “to show kindness and concern for others.”
3. Ask students what some examples of caring words and actions are that we might hear and see, such as: students helping each other, strategies for solving disagreements, daily greetings and goodbyes, being inclusive.
4. Invite students to consider specific attitudes, actions and ways of being they would like to foster in the classroom. Ask students to think about the type of community they would like to learn in and what are some things that they should include in that community. Ensure the following topics are included if they do not come up:
  - How we speak to each other.
  - How we solve problems or disagreements.
  - How we want to feel in class (calm, connected, belonging).

## PART 5

# Community Think-Pair-Share

1. Ask students to take a moment to write down their initial thoughts on the characteristics they would like to see in their classroom community:
  - What would we like our community to be like? Write down some key things that are important to you.
2. Give students a few minutes to write down some of their ideas on their own.
3. Invite them to share with a partner giving each student one minute to share.

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**PART 6****Reflection**

As a class, reflect on the lesson and offer students information about next steps for building a caring community:

*“Today, we began thinking about what a caring community might look like in our classroom. Next time, we’ll build our ideas out further and begin to make a plan to put into action, to create the community where we feel we all belong.”*

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**PART 7****Culminating Activity****Reflect**

Distribute cue cards and instruct students to reflect and write or draw about one new connection they made or similarity they discovered and are grateful for. Collect, review and share with the class at the start of next class.

## OPTIONAL

# Calibrations

These optional ideas may help you adjust this lesson to your particular group of students.

### General Suggestions

- During partnered activities, try and pair stronger students with students who have more difficulties.
- For independent activities (e.g., writing tasks), check in with students and make sure they processed and understood the directions by having them recite them back to you.
- Allow students who struggle with overstimulation to go to different parts of the room during partnered activities to achieve calmer/quieter working spaces.

### Simplifications

- Add symbols/images to any written directions to help developing readers.
- Instead of having students write down their ideas about what they would like their community to be like, have them discuss with a partner

### Challengers

- When introducing “community,” explore the different levels of community and where the school community fits into those layers. Placing the idea of community in the greater context may help students better internalize its impact. E.g., Home as a nuclear community, extended family as a community, your neighborhood/town/province/state/country as a community.

## LESSON 2

# Investigate and Learn

## *Creating a Caring Classroom Community*

### Purpose

Help students explore ideas about what makes a caring classroom environment. Through this exercise, students will have the opportunity to build on their previous knowledge and deepen their understanding of the concepts of caring and community.

### Objective

Students will engage in collaborative learning, reflect on what a caring community looks like for themselves and hear each other's perspective on what contributes to a caring classroom community.

#### Estimated Time

- 30 to 40 minutes

#### Skills Learned

- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Communication Skills
- Collaboration Skills
- Reflection Skills

#### Materials

- Chart paper
- Markers
- Sticky notes
- SMARTboard or white/chalkboard

## PART 1

# Introduction

Invite students to reflect and share any comments they've made on the cue cards from the previous lesson, where appropriate. The intention is to reinforce similarities and challenge students to reflect on what we see as differences and how we honor those differences. You can also choose to use one of the community building activities from the previous lesson.

## PART 2

# Review

Refer to the “caring classroom” brainstorm as a reminder of the collaboration from last class.

1. Invite students to review their initial thoughts from the previous lesson about the type of community they would like to learn in.
2. Ask students to identify any other ideas on characteristics, conditions or values that are important to their classroom community. Record their ideas on the board. Include the following topics if they do not come up:
  - How we speak to each other.
  - How we solve problems or disagreements.
  - How we want to feel in class (calm, connected, belonging).
3. Reflect on the ideas on the board to see if any themes or key values emerge. Ask students if they think anything is missing.
4. Prompt students to remember these themes as you begin to move into creating a plan for cultivating your classroom community.

## PART 3

# Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like

The purpose of the following activity is to collect students' ideas about what a caring classroom looks, sounds and feels like.

- Place three large pieces of chart paper around the room with the following headers:
  - What does a caring classroom look like?**  
How is the room organized? With desks, chairs, etc.
  - What does a caring classroom sound like?**  
What do the voices, language and communication sound like?
  - What does a caring classroom feel like?**  
How do you want to feel in our classroom: Calm, happy, engaged, interested?
- For each of the three categories, invite the class to brainstorm ideas to build a caring classroom (or school) community. Examples of ideas:

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>A caring classroom looks like:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desks are organized in working groups, rather than rows.</li> <li>• Welcoming student art is displayed.</li> </ul> | <p><b>A caring classroom sounds like:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list of friendly, solution-oriented language is posted.</li> <li>• Create communication agreements.</li> </ul> | <p><b>A caring classroom feels like:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A class charter is created to ensure inclusion and peaceful problem-solving.</li> <li>• Students regularly move desks to have an opportunity to work with each member of the classroom.</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|

## OPTIONAL

Invite students to move around the room in small groups to add their ideas to each of the three pieces of chart paper. This could look like three groups rotating together with three to five minutes at each poster.

**PART 4**

# Reflecting on Community

You can choose to have either a class discussion or a small group reflection to help students reflect on the three categories.

## Class Discussion

1. Ask students to take a moment to read each category's list and find common themes.
2. Have a concluding discussion as a class. Use the following guiding questions:
  - What do you notice about our lists?
  - Are there common themes?
  - Is there anything missing?
3. Working together, synthesize three to five core values or themes that emerge from these discussions. Record them for use in the next step of action planning.

## Small Group Reflection

1. Reorganize the groups and assign each one to a chart paper. Instruct the groups to review the ideas on the paper and be prepared to share out loud with the class. Use the following guiding questions:
  - What do you notice about the list?
  - Are there common themes?
  - Is there anything missing?
2. Ask each group to share the most common conditions or themes that emerged. Prompt them that these will be the conditions that we will be creating an action plan for next.
3. As a group, work to synthesize three to five core values or themes that emerge from these discussions. Record these for use in the next step of action planning.

## PART 5

## Culminating Activity

Show the following quote and give students time to reflect based on the work they have done to build class community. Depending on the needs of the class, you could choose to have a class discussion, partner talk or encourage a quiet write or draw activity.

**Be here. Be you. Belong.**  
*This classroom belongs to all of us.*  
– Brené Brown

### Additional resources on student-led learning

- [edutopia.org/discussion/how-put-self-directed-learning-work-your-classroom](https://edutopia.org/discussion/how-put-self-directed-learning-work-your-classroom)
- [ferndaleschools.org/academics/elementary/self-directed-learning](https://ferndaleschools.org/academics/elementary/self-directed-learning)
- [missiontolearn.com/self-directed-learning-success](https://missiontolearn.com/self-directed-learning-success)
- [study.com/academy/lesson/self-direct-learning-definition-strategies.html](https://study.com/academy/lesson/self-direct-learning-definition-strategies.html)

## OPTIONAL

# Calibrations

These optional ideas may help you adjust this lesson to your particular group of students.

## General Suggestions

- Be mindful of groups; try and diversify (this includes gender, ethnicity, skill ability, etc.).
- For students who struggle with writing, a voice recorder that they can use to go back and re-listen to the planning session may be helpful.

## Simplifications

- For students who have difficulty organizing their thinking, it may be useful to provide them with copies of the chart paper lists and/or themes developed in Lesson 1 for them to write on directly.
- Offer concrete examples for them to build out (e.g., class meetings, a class charter, games for relationship building, etc.).
- Draw pictures to capture ideas instead of writing.
- Split up this lesson into three separate activities: How does our classroom look? How does our classroom sound? How does our classroom feel?

## Challengers

- When reflecting on the themes developed on the chart paper, specifically guide them toward the concepts of safety, trust, engagement and support. Why are these four qualities important in a classroom? What may happen if they're missing?

## LESSON 3

# Action Plan

## *Planning Our Caring Classroom Community*

### Purpose

Through collaborative learning, this lesson encourages students to work together to plan their initiatives for creating a caring classroom structure. The activities included in this lesson helps students plan actions and address the topic of inclusion.

### Objective

Students will engage in collaborative learning, create a plan of action to create a caring classroom community and consider how to support actions to increase inclusion and belonging in their classroom.

#### Estimated Time

- 40 minutes
- May take more than one session

#### Skills Learned

- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Communication Skills
- Collaboration Skills
- Reflection Skills

#### Materials

- Chart paper
- Markers
- SMARTboard or white/chalkboard

## PART 1

# Review Student-Generated Ideas

1. Display the three pieces of chart paper and have a short class discussion to review the key themes established in Lesson 2 on page 19.
  - What does a caring classroom look like?
  - What does a caring classroom sound like?
  - What does a caring classroom feel like?
2. After reviewing the key themes, ask students:  
**What core values did we identify that are important to us?**

## PART 2

# Overview of Skills for Collaboration

This step will help students collaborate by providing them with guidelines for collaboration.

1. Foreshadow the next activity and ask students what skills they might need. You can say something like: “Next, we are going to make a plan to create our classroom community together. To do this, we are going to work collaboratively.”
2. Ensure that students understand the term “collaboration.” Provide them with the following definition: collaboration means to work together with others to make or produce something.
3. Ask students: “What skills would you need to collaborate?” Invite them to write their ideas on the board. Examples:
  - Listen to one another’s ideas and perspectives
  - Be willing to compromise
  - Ensure everyone has equal chance to participate
4. Find additional resources about collaborative learning on page 28.

**PART 3**

# Planning Session

The objective of the planning session is for students to develop actionable plans to create a caring class community. In Step 1, it might be helpful to create groups based on the three brainstorming questions from Lesson 2 (Look Like, Sound Like, Feel Like). Then, in Part 4, invite each group to share their ideas and plan with the rest of class. Make sure to document the planning process by taking pictures or video. This documentation will be shown to students during their reflection and celebration in Lesson 5.

1. Arrange students in three groups to outline their action plan to create a caring classroom environment and encourage them to consider ideas that are simple and achievable.
2. Ask students to brainstorm potential ideas for how to cultivate this type of environment in their classroom. This could look like simple actions that can happen in class, guidelines for how treat each other or classroom routines/practices. Remind them to refer back to the notes they created on what a caring classroom looks like, feels like and sounds like.
  - Many of these ideas may have come up in the initial class brainstorm. Instruct students to think through each idea with regard to the steps and resources they will need to make it achievable.
  - Remind students that these ideas must be achievable by the group. So while they are encouraged to be creative and innovative, they must be realistic. For example, if they want to share food together as a celebration, what is a reasonable possibility?
3. Invite each of the three groups to add their ideas to their accompanying chart paper (Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like).
4. If students are struggling to come up with ideas independently, follow the suggestions on the following page for ways to scaffold their thinking to reach the goal.

**Use prompting questions:**

- “It sounds like you think \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are important qualities to have in a caring classroom. Can you think of an activity or classroom alteration that reminds everyone or allows the class to practice them?”
- “Can you think of any challenges or boundaries that would make completing this activity difficult or not possible?”

**Encourage students to use their prior knowledge:**

- “What have you done in previous classrooms or years that you found useful?”
- “Are there any models you’ve seen outside of school (e.g., religious institution, sports practice) where a caring environment was established?” Try working backward: “Have you had experiences where you didn’t feel as comfortable? Can you identify why? What could have made it feel better?”

**Provide the opportunity for exploration**

- Offer a chance for students to do web searches for ideas (encourage them to come up with their own appropriate or helpful search terms).

**Guide students to manage their resources**

- Time. E.g., “We will have one class period to enact our action plans, do you think we will have enough time for your activity?”
- Materials. Set limits based on what you feel is appropriate. E.g., what is only in the classroom or already in your home that you can bring in.
- Identifying strengths and preferences for task assignments.

**Support disagreements by providing resolution-centered language**

- Offer communication repair prompts such as, “I hear you saying \_\_\_\_\_. Is that correct?”
- Encourage students to identify how they’re feeling so they can name it and move on. E.g., “I see that your arms are crossed and your body is turned away. It looks to me like you’re frustrated, is that right?”

## PART 4

# Sharing

Invite each group to share their ideas and plans with the rest of the class.

1. Give each group time to present their ideas with the rest of the class. At this time, encourage students to ask questions and request clarification to ensure that each description is clear and each idea has an implementation plan.
2. As the facilitator, ensure that any potential challenges are brought up and resolved. For example, consider resources, space, time and accountability.
3. Ensure that all ideas are clearly articulated as the next step will be to vote on practices and actions, not core values or themes.

## PART 5 (OPTIONAL)

# Vote on Ideas

Use this step if you feel that there are more ideas than would be feasible to implement.

1. Let the class know that the next step is to come to a class decision on which ideas you will implement.
2. Distribute three small stickers to each student and allow them to vote for the ideas they would like to see by placing a sticker by that idea. You may decide that students must vote for three different ideas or can place all three on an idea they really like.

**PART 6**

# Culminating Activity or Reflection

**If you implemented the voting activity in Part 5, follow these steps with students:**

1. Hang posters and invite initial feedback around voting results. Ask students: “What trends do we see? Are there any surprises or questions that the votes raise?”
2. Invite students to reflect on how they feel when seeing how the class votes. Remind them that we are not voting for individuals but for ideas. Validate that they may be feeling a variety of feelings (frustration, anger, sadness, happiness) when they see how their peers have voted.
3. Remind the class that we are working to create a kind and caring classroom where everyone belongs. As such we want to make sure that our practices and actions reflect the needs of the entire class.
4. Express your gratitude to the class and recognize that this is hard work. This can also be an opportunity to model how to express gratitude and you may want to invite students to express gratitude if appropriate.
5. Tell the class that the next step will be to put all of these wonderful ideas into action!

**If you did not have students vote on ideas, close the lesson with the following steps:**

1. Remind the class that we are we working to create a kind and caring classroom where everyone belongs. As such we want to make sure that our practices and actions reflect the needs of the entire class.
2. Express your gratitude to the class and recognize that this is hard work. This can also be an opportunity to model how to express gratitude, and you may want to invite students to express gratitude if appropriate.
3. Tell the class that the next step will be to put all of these wonderful ideas into action!

## OPTIONAL

# Calibrations

These optional ideas may help you adjust this lesson to your particular group of students.

## General Suggestions

- Keep the three pieces of chart paper (Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like) visible for the entire implementation of the Foundation Module.

## Simplifications

- Provide a visual organizer that helps students identify what information they need to create, such as the attached example of a Caring Community Action Plan Organizer.
- Offer concrete examples for them to build out (e.g., class meetings, a class charter).

## Challengers

- Have students provide a written rationale for their action plan.
- Have students consider how their plan could be extrapolated to the other rings of community (assuming they did the challenge in Lesson 2).

### Additional resources on collaborative learning

- [edutopia.org/topic/collaborative-learning](https://edutopia.org/topic/collaborative-learning)
- [teachhub.com/quick-guide-cooperative-learning](https://teachhub.com/quick-guide-cooperative-learning)
- [resourced.prometheanworld.com/collaborative-learning-primary-schools](https://resourced.prometheanworld.com/collaborative-learning-primary-schools)
- [teachthought.com/pedagogy/20-collaborative-learning-tips-and-strategies](https://teachthought.com/pedagogy/20-collaborative-learning-tips-and-strategies)

# Caring Community Action Plan Organizer

## Action Steps:

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## Person(s) Responsible:

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## Materials Needed:

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## Time It Will Take:

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## Potential Challenges:

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## LESSON 4

# Take Action

## *Taking Action to Create a Caring Classroom Community*

### Purpose

Through this lesson, students will work together to advance their plan to create a caring classroom structure into action. At this stage, students will start acting on their ideas and plans to achieve their goal of developing a classroom environment they want.

### Objective

Students will engage in active learning and work together to take action to create a caring classroom community.

#### Estimated Time

- 30 to 40 minutes
- May take more than one session

#### Skills Learned

- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Communication Skills
- Collaboration Skills
- Reflection Skills

#### Materials

- Materials may vary depending on the students' action plan

## PART 1

## Activation or Community Builder

1. Ask for students to reflect on the process so far of creating a caring classroom environment: Have they felt connected to each other and the process? Have they been able to be themselves in the process and been able to communicate their thoughts, feeling and ideas?
2. Choose a method of reflection that suits the needs of your class. Some ideas include:
  - Think-Pair-Share
  - Quiet write
  - Visual representation such as sculpting, building or drawing using a variety of mediums: playdough, building blocks or paper.
  - Inside or outside circles
  - Partner talk
3. Give students the opportunity to share their reflection with the whole class.



## PART 2

## Preparing to Take Action

1. Review student-generated ideas by displaying the three chart papers (Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like) and have a short class discussion to review the key themes and action plans established in Lessons 2 and 3, and establish the key ideas that will be the focus of action, based on the voting results (if used) from the previous lesson.
2. Review collaboration skills and guidelines. Have students' break up into their action-plan groups from Lesson 3.
3. Remind students of the main goal: creating a caring, safe classroom environment.
4. Allow students the chance to review their plans and remind themselves what they will need to do to create their caring community.
5. Be available for questions and keep an eye out for a lack of engagement or participation to offer support and reminders.
6. Have one representative from each group share with the class—this is the opportunity to address any overlapping ideas.
  - If there are significant overlaps, have the groups merge. Students will manage reviewing the similarities and differences of their plans and combine them into one. Encourage flexible thinking and compromise.



**PART 3**

# Taking Action

Provide time for students to put their plan into action. Make sure to document students' actions by taking pictures or video to show the class during their reflection and celebration in Lesson 5. If students are struggling to complete the assignment, here are suggestions for ways to scaffold their thinking to reach the goal:

**Use prompting questions:**

- “What should you do, first, next, last?”
- “It looks like you’re stuck, can you identify the problem? Is it an issue of time or material?”
- “It sounds like you’ve identified the problem. What element can you change to try and find a solution?”

**Encourage students to use their prior knowledge:**

- “Have you done an activity like this before? Can you remember any issues that came up that could be avoided by doing something differently?”

**Guide students to manage their resources:**

- Time reminders
- Flexibility about materials
- Task assignment reminders

**Support disagreements by providing resolution-centered language:**

- Offer communication repair prompts such as, “I hear you saying \_\_\_\_\_. Is that correct?”
- Encourage children to identify how they’re feeling so they can name it and move on. E.g., “I see that your arms are crossed and your body is turned away, it looks to me like you’re frustrated. Is that right?”

(OPTIONAL)

## Calibrations

Use the following ideas to help you to calibrate the lesson to your particular group of students.

### General Suggestions

- Provide a visual reminder such as writing steps on the board: First, Next, Last.
- Ask students to refer to their Caring Community Action Plan Organizer from Lesson 3.

### Simplifications

- Provide students with a “First, next, last” handout for them to fill out to stay organized before embarking on the tasks.

### Challengers

- Have students write their projections for how their action plan will make a positive difference in the classroom.



## LESSON 5

# Reflect

## *Reflecting on Our Community*

### Purpose

Together, students will reflect on their work to create a caring classroom through this lesson. Reflection is an important part of this process as it encourages students to use their critical thinking and communication skills. Students will have the opportunity to look back on what they've achieved and prepare for future lessons and activities.

### Objective

Students will engage in self-reflection and listen to one another's reflections on their shared experience building community.

#### Estimated Time

- 30 to 40 minutes
- May take more than one session

#### Skills Learned

- Critical Thinking
- Communication Skills
- Reflection Skills

#### Materials

- Photos or video from the planning and action steps of this module
- SMARTboard or white/chalkboard
- Note cards with envelopes

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## PART 1

# A Walk Down Memory Lane

1. Display the photos or videos to help students remember their work fostering their community connection. This can be accomplished with a slideshow, video or photos displayed around the room for students view as a gallery.
  2. Instruct students to look at the pictures or video and notice how they feel as they remember their work building their community connection.
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## PART 2

# Reflect

1. Invite students to take a few minutes to reflect on their own personal experience working with their classmates to build connection and care in their classroom.
2. Instruct students to take a few minutes to write down their reflections about their own experience building their classroom community. Here are some ideas to get them started:
  - How did it feel to work together?
  - How are you feeling now, after our work together?
  - What more would you like to contribute to our community?

## PART 3

# Connect

In a Think-Pair-Share activity, invite students to share with a partner their reflection on their community building experience. Instructions to students:

- With your partner, share a reflection. It can be something that you noticed, something more you would like to do or something you felt during our work together.

## PART 4

# Shared Reflection

Facilitate a class discussion focused on sharing students' reflections with one another. Ensure students engage in respectful, active listening for one another. Refer to the suggestions for introducing guidelines for effective communication.

1. Instructions to students:

- Now, we'll share out loud as a community. Please share your reflections about our work building connection in our classroom.
2. Facilitate a student discussion (Popcorn Strategy/Share) and write student responses on the board.
3. After students have had an opportunity to share, facilitate a class discussion on next steps with the prompting questions:

**Now that we have worked together to build the community we would like to be a part of, what would be some next steps to keep our classroom community strong?**

- How do we ensure accountability on our actions and ideas?
- What happens if we stray away from our core values we established as a class?
- Do we check in our action plans as a group? Frequency? How?
- What happens if one of our members does not feel connected to our community?

4. Facilitate a student discussion (Popcorn Strategy/Share) and write student responses on the board.

## PART 5

# Making Connections

Invite students to reflect once more and write down some connections they see between their initial reflection and those from their classmates.

Provide the following instructions to students:

Take a few minutes to add to your reflections the connections you see between your initial reflections and your classmates' experiences of our community building.

Also note any next steps you think you could take to continue building care and connection in our classroom.

## PART 6

# Simple Actions

Introduce Simple Actions to Strengthen Community (on the next page), a set of simple actions designed to promote transferable learning, that will proceed this lesson. You can tell students that over the next few weeks, the class will be taking some simple actions to continue to build their community and strengthen their connection to the larger community around them.

These simple actions are designed to promote transferable learning by inviting students to explore the module topics across four life domains: Self, School, Community and Home. After completing this module, students should be provided time to explore each of the following simple actions and write a personal reflection of their experience applying them.

# Simple Actions to Build Community

## Self

Students explore what community means to them.

- Example: Students write reflections or create an art portfolio identifying aspects of community that foster their sense of connection.

## School

Find ways to foster a sense of belonging across the school community.

- Example: Organize buddy classroom activities for older and younger grades to help foster connection, leadership skills and community.

## Community

Invite students to use the four steps of the WE Schools service-learning framework (Investigate, Action Plan, Take Action, Record and Celebrate) to organize an initiative to build connections to the larger community.

- Example: Connect with a local high school to help build a bridge for students during the transition from elementary to high school.

## Home

Build a bridge from classroom to home, asking students to think of creative ways to build and extend the classroom community to home.

- Example: Create a student-led newspaper that shares classroom and school news with families, inviting families to contribute.

## PART 7

# Culminating Activity

1. Distribute a cue card and envelope to each student.
2. Lead the following reflection by instructing the students to imagine that it is now the end of the semester or year. Tell students:
  - Imagine how it feels to be at the end of the school year. Now reflect on the experiences that we shared together as a community of learners. How did you feel? What did you learn about yourself and classmates? What did you enjoy? What were some of the challenges? Write down these reflections imagining that it is the last day of this class.
3. Invite students to include the things that they have personally done well this year.
4. Once finished, have students seal the card in their envelope and address it to themselves. Collect them and let them know that you will distribute them back on the last day of class.



(OPTIONAL)

## Calibrations

Use the following ideas to help you to calibrate the lesson to your particular group of students.

### General Suggestions

- During partnered activities, try and pair stronger students with students who have more difficulties.
- For independent activities (e.g., writing tasks), check in with students and make sure they processed and understand the directions by having them recite them back to you.
- Allow students who struggle with overstimulation to go to different parts of the room during partnered activities to achieve calmer or quieter working spaces.

### Simplifications

- For writing reflections, offer the option to list adjectives or a single sentence for each adjective.
- Remove the writing components and reflect as a class or in small groups through a discussion with the prompts written out and read aloud.
- In Part 4: Future Reflection, offer an alternative drawing activity or spoken word recorded reflection.

### Challengers

- Have students reflect on ways to extrapolate their action plans to the greater communities initially outlined in Lesson 1. What may work? What wouldn't work when scaled? Why?
- Have students find examples of other schools "creating a caring environment plans" and compare and contrast.

## NEXT STEPS

# Jump Into WE Schools

Now that you and your students have finished the WE Schools Foundational Module and established a caring classroom environment for all, you're ready to embark on the next step of your WE Schools journey!

It's important that we build and foster an environment that is supportive and inclusive so that students can thrive. A safe space to share ideas and make others feel that they are a part of a community is also a space that supports learning. When students are heard and respected, they have the room to grow, develop and succeed.



# Acknowledgments

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