

Whole Child Model - Building Regional Capacity to Scale (WCMv2)
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Our partnership is excited to submit our EIR mid-phase project, *Whole Child Model - Building Regional Capacity to Scale (WCMv2)*, expanding the model from our 2021 EIR early-phase grant. Our project meets **Absolute Priority 1** for Moderate Evidence (see the Evidence Form and section D) and addresses **Absolute Priority 4 - Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs**.

Our implementation partners include two **regional rural** coordinating organizations and their rural member districts in Alabama and California, and one remote Texas district serving a high number of English Learners. Partner 1 is the University of West Alabama (UWA),¹ a **Predominantly Black Institution (PBI)**. The project meets **Competitive Preference 1** by partnering with this minority-serving institution, where about 40% of the students enrolled identify as Black. We will partner with the UWA's Center for Rural Education (CRE) which supports 67 counties in one of the most rural and poverty-stricken areas of the south. Partner 2 is the North State Together K-16 Collaborative (NST), consisting of ten counties and remote rural districts in northern California. Partner 3, El Paso Independent School District (EPISD), borders Mexico and 43% of students qualify for English Learner supports. We are also very proud to be submitting with a **rural partner district** that is part of the CRE consortia, Sumter County School District, AL (locale code 43).² Additionally, two-thirds of our school partners will be rural as identified by locale codes. All schools in our project serve a majority of high-need students.³ All partners in this project have extensive experience building local capacity in communities with constrained resources and all also have expertise with large-scale federal programs. SRI, our external evaluator, will conduct a randomized controlled trial evaluation. This project will reach 30 schools (10 in each region) and approximately 10,000 students, 76%

of whom qualify for the National Lunch Program on average. Another 30 schools and 10,000 students will serve as controls in the study that can receive support after the RCT ends.

Additionally, the project meets **Competitive Priority 2** by using a **community-based process to assess local needs exacerbated by the pandemic and apply evidence-based instructional approaches and support**. Our model implements a community-centered design process and practices and strategies reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) that have strong evidence of positive impact (see the Evidence Form).

A. SIGNIFICANCE: The pandemic has had durable effects on our schools, including decreased student well-being,⁴ academic engagement, and attendance,⁵ and decreased teacher well-being and retention,⁶ all compounding to exacerbate existing learning gaps that the pandemic worsened for high-need students⁷ (see section C for more detail). Our proposed project offers promising new and evidence-based practices that build on existing SEL programming. The *WCMv2-Building Regional Capacity to Scale*'s goal is to develop the capacity of regional networks and district staff to support elementary schools to ensure student and teacher well-being and student academic success across diverse geographies and populations. The project will shift our model from direct support delivered by Transcend staff to building the local capacity of regional networks and certifying district staff to support schools implementing the *WCMv2* so the knowledge, resources, and skills remain local and can be replicated in more schools beyond the grant period. This project is based on a 2021 early-phase EIR that is showing promise. For example, we have fully retained all participating schools and have strong early implementation data that indicate a clear departure from business-as-usual practices. After one year, pilots resulted in meaningful gains in students' sense of belonging (~50% increase in District 1 and ~20% increase in District 2).⁸ One school was named SEL school of the year by their district.

Model Overview: Our early phase work helps schools use a community-based process to adopt and adapt the Whole Child Model (WCM). WCM consists of three components: CARE (tier 1 supports), Boost (tier 2 and 3 interventions), and Family Circle (family engagement strategies) that are grounded in the brain-based research of the neurosequential model.⁹ The practices draw on foundational research about the importance of strong relationships and attachments,¹⁰ protective and adaptive factors for youth experiencing trauma,¹¹ and the role restorative practices play in shaping environments.¹² Together, the WCM practices touch every part of the student experience; they increase prosocial interactions and academic learning within an inclusive environment where strong (and well) teachers want to stay and students and families feel valued. The model is a cohesive starting point, and it is designed to be adapted to meet the specific context of school communities. We implement a community design process where a diverse set of school staff participate on a **design team** to test, refine and implement practices. (For more foundational research, see section C3.). The model includes the following components: **CARE** (Compassion, Assertiveness, Relationships, Environment) is a cohesive suite of Tier 1 strategies designed to create a safe and predictable classroom community where students feel valued, learn to self-regulate, and work in ways that help them meet individual, class, and community goals. **Boost** is a suite of Tier 2¹³ and 3¹⁴ strategies for students who need extra support to feel safe, build trusting relationships, and learn to self-regulate. Historically, pre-pandemic, 5-10% of our students needed this “boost.” However, since the pandemic, this number is closer to one in five. Boost includes a set of tailored interventions that classroom teachers can use directly, as well as a set of strategies counselors, support staff, and behavior techs can access. These boosts prioritize (a) offering each student the highest-leverage supports for their specific needs and (b) feasibility for staff to implement with integrity. **Family Circle** is a critical element

of the WCM that helps create a supportive network of relationships comprising a student's school and home supports, which are critical to support holistic development.

In addition to improving student well-being and preparing students for academic success, the professional learning and experiences that prepare teachers to implement the WCM also support teachers' well-being. We support schools to create time and routines that foster supportive adult relationships and identify supports the adults find most beneficial and support implementation. Our training is designed to increase adults' self-awareness and help them identify strategies they can use to respond to stressful situations.

Based on our early dissemination efforts including inspiration visits, word-of-mouth sharing, and the positive momentum of data within districts participating in our early-phase EIR grant, Transcend has been asked to expand our support and consider building a model to train regional and district personnel to support more schools. These activities are beyond the scope of the early-phase grant but demonstrate genuine community-driven interest in this field-based innovation. Based on this interest, we view the mid-phase grant as a strategy to scale the WCM by developing and testing a model that can build regional capacity through a train-the-coaches strategy, as well as produce stand-alone toolkits that can be made widely available. This is a timely project because our outcomes focus on improving student and teacher well-being, improving engagement and attendance, decreasing chronic absenteeism, and improving learning – all of which are significant national needs and priorities set by the Biden Administration's Improving Student Achievement Agenda¹⁵ and the Secretary's Raise the Bar: Lead the World initiative to promote academic excellence and boldly improve learning conditions.¹⁶

New Strategies that Make the WCM Different: Key components of WCM are grounded in existing strategies supported by the **Institute of Education Sciences'** Reducing Behavior

Problems in the Elementary School Classroom: A Practice Guide,¹⁷ which demonstrates the association between practices and improved outcomes, such as student SEL skills and learning meeting **strong evidence** standards (Absolute Priority 1 - see the Evidence Form). The WCM improves traditional SEL programming by implementing innovative strategies that are integrated across the whole school and whole day.

Innovative Strategy #1: Community Design Process: Anchoring in a **community design process** allows for differentiation based on community needs, with a specific emphasis on student voice. We start by partnering with communities who truly believe this model will meet the specific needs they are facing. To demonstrate our commitment to ensuring the WCM is a good fit, **we spent over 100 hours recruiting our partners for this mid-phase application, including hosting 13 informational learning sessions and virtual inspiration visits attended by 100+ people from our partners.** During these sessions, local participants from regional offices, district offices, and school personnel could see the model in action, hear an overview of the project, and ask questions to map local assets and needs (Competitive Priority 2). Once our partnership begins, our community design process is co-led with a diverse group of stakeholders who consistently plan, pilot, and use student input to refine and adapt Whole Child Model strategies to fit the specific community context. For example, student surveys will help them understand the experience of learners and adapt the design and implementation to meet those needs. This is distinct from typical community engagement, which often happens once or stops at surveys or other light touch approaches.

Innovative Strategy #2: Adaptable and integrated whole school SEL practices: SEL solutions to date have been isolated one-size-fits-all point solutions typically confined to a limited block of time in the school day. A transformative approach to SEL requires much more

than just adopting a boxed curriculum or isolated practices, or providing direct instruction about social and emotional skills - it has implications for every aspect of the learning environment. The Whole Child Model is a cohesive set of mindsets, skills, behaviors, and practices that are integrated throughout the **whole day and whole school** and are contextualized to center student and staff needs. A study found that although 83% of principals strongly endorse SEL and 98% believe it would benefit students from all backgrounds, only 35% have a plan for teaching SEL. The WCM provides a much-needed model and concrete practices for high-quality implementation that is adaptable to each local context. See Exhibit 1 for examples.

Exhibit 1: Existing Practices and Innovative Practices

Existing practice	Innovative practice
Greetings happen inconsistently or happen in a way that feels perfunctory and lacks opportunity for concrete meaningful interaction and relationship building.	WCM greetings happen daily and consistently and include critical elements like choice to support student agency, eye contact to reinforce connection, and verbal exchanges to practice listening and responding and to build relationships. Together, this results in a predictable warm welcome to the classroom that communicates to students that they are safe, loved, and part of a nurturing school community.
Morning meetings often include random activities without specific sequencing, intent, or structure.	Strong Start is an intentionally designed set of sequenced practices (partner activity, whole group activity, breathing, and goal setting) that maximizes student learning by helping them strengthen peer relationships, build classroom community, practice skills to regulate stress, and set and reflect on goals.
Classroom jobs are typically randomly assigned, given to only a few students (often based on their strengths), or used as a reward or punishment.	Jobs are assigned to every single student to underscore the idea that each young person plays an essential role in the community. Jobs are assigned based on specific needs so that they offer additional practice or support in areas where students most need it, like building organizational skills or making positive connections with others.

<p>Recess and in-school suspension are often applied punitively and remove movement and activity from students likely needing to circulate cortisol out of their neuro-lymphatic system. The punishment does not support students in building the skills they need to rejoin their class.</p>	<p>Structured Recess and Restorative In-School Suspension are structured practices that allow students to safely practice skills that can help them appropriately handle conflict while allowing movement. When students must be in an alternate setting for physical safety, the setting is designed to help them build the skills they need while also strengthening their connection to the school community.</p>
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Innovative Strategy #3: Focus on both student *and* adult well-being: Through our early-stage EIR grant, we have learned the importance of focusing on the adults in schools early in the process and consistently. In order for adults to create a predictable environment and remain calm in the face of challenges, they must be aware of and able to regulate their own emotions, and they must be able to draw on the support of their colleagues. Our approach includes building educators’ mindsets about well-being,¹⁸ helping them identify strategies for coping with stress, learning about needs that the school can support and piloting responsive strategies, and nurturing adult relationships. And, teachers report that the student-facing practices and the classroom community they create also support their well-being, which aligns with the research showing that teachers benefit when students become more prosocial. Teachers use less harsh discipline and feel more efficacious and less burnt out. In turn, the school climate improves.¹⁹

Innovative Strategy #4: The WHY behind the model is based on developmental brain science research: The WCM starts by building a shared understanding of how WCM practices can literally change neural pathways. By bringing brain science to life and connecting to the research on how the brain functions, educators build a deep understanding of why each strategy or practice is effective and how they build together to create a safe and predictable learning environment. This understanding allows them to make context-specific modifications that meet

their students' unique needs while maintaining fidelity to the underlying science of how children grow and develop. (For more research, see section C3.).

B. SCALE STRATEGY: The WCM is truly a field-initiated innovation, originating in one school under the leadership of an innovative founder and school leader in District of Columbia Public Schools, [REDACTED]. The early-phase EIR has allowed us to build and codify the model while testing it across two urban districts, Aldine ISD and District of Columbia Public Schools. As we enter the second year of implementation of our early phase, we're encouraged by the initial data which indicate positive trends across various metrics (see section A). Our early efforts and the resulting data are building confidence and interest in the model.

In the 2023-2024 school year alone, **outside** of recruitment for this grant, we've hosted more than 15 in-person inspiration visits, engaging over 150 stakeholders from across the country, including school leaders, funders, and community members who are interested in learning what is possible. In addition, Transcend has a broad network of direct partnerships in diverse communities nationwide, including a rural portfolio spanning 13 districts nationwide and impacting nearly 24,000 students. This portfolio of partners has also expressed an interest in the WCM, underscoring the universal need for comprehensive well-being support as well as the need for capacity-building within these communities. However, despite the enthusiasm, the financial constraints faced by local districts have posed significant hurdles to adoption, especially if WCM remains a direct support model.

The mid-phase grant opportunity offers critical possibilities for communities. Relying solely on direct partnerships to spread the WCM is neither scalable nor economically feasible. The grant will enable us to pivot towards a more sustainable strategy of building local capacity of regions, districts, and schools to foster student and staff well-being effectively.

B.1 Barriers and Strategies: Exhibit 2. Barriers to Scale and Proposed Innovations/Solutions

Barriers to Scale	Innovations/Solutions
<p>Interventions are often a one-size-fits-all solution that are meant to be implemented as designed, without adaptation for local context. This can decrease effectiveness and lower investment, and interventions do not continue after a partnership ends.</p>	<p>1. Establish structures to systematically engage the community beyond school staff to ensure they help set and hold the vision—especially students. This community design process not only builds ownership but contextualizes and adapts the model to the local setting. Our partners are ready for community-based change, and their unique assets support enabling conditions for success: building a coalition with conviction.</p>
<p>Lack of local capacity: Districts do not have access to the knowledge or expertise to provide and sustain support and adequate PD. National organizations do not have the capacity or financial resources to provide direct support at scale.</p>	<p>2. Develop a regional capacity-building model for support and scale where local coaches attend a <i>WCMv2</i> orientation and then participate in ongoing job-embedded <i>WCMv2</i> training that includes direct professional learning, shadowing of Transcend coaches, observation and feedback, and a national network community of practitioners. This comprehensive training will result in national certification of the coaches.</p>
<p>Constraints in remote areas: Remote communities, especially rural, are often stretched thin by daily operations. They typically do not have dedicated instructional coaches assigned to areas like math or SEL but, rather, share responsibilities. Additionally, remote areas with unique populations such large English Learner enrollment require more supports.</p>	<p>3. Expand to geographically diverse and remote areas. To date, the WCM has been implemented in urban areas. To test generalizability of this model in other settings, we will build capacity in remote areas that allows them to continue beyond the grant. This approach will not only help our current partners sustain the work, it will ultimately allow the model to spread to more communities. Additionally, schools can share lessons and solutions with each other to accelerate progress. Our rural portfolio work has taught us about the assets of these communities, including a deep commitment to making their local context better and their nimbleness to try new things.</p>
<p>Lack of access to online resources: Resources are often behind a paywall or only accessible if you partner with an organization, or materials are presented as piecemeal stand alone activities.</p>	<p>4. Provide a robust, open-source resource library including participant guides and toolkits that coaches can access to pilot new practices in a student-centered way that allow for differentiation in model implementation. These resources will follow a scope and sequence and allow non-grantees access to replicate the model beyond grant participation.</p>

Strategies: The *WCMv2* will address these barriers through the four strategies in Exhibit 2.

Strategy 1 - Use a community design process to understand local assets and needs and adapt the model to the local context. Transcend has devoted extensive resources to studying and building a structured approach to involving a diverse group of stakeholders in a community school design process. Because every community has unique assets and needs, and because building conviction and ownership are hallmarks of sustainable change, we anchor our partnerships on developing early ownership and input from diverse stakeholders, and students are critical stakeholders. For this project, we have partnered with trusted members of local communities who are the experts of their strengths and needs. Each partner will identify local coaches in the community. Transcend, together with the community organization and local coaches, will engage in the community design and asset-mapping process that includes identifying a design team to lead change efforts, articulating a case for change, building conviction in a shared vision, and building a coalition to support innovation toward this vision. The extensive community relationships of our partners - the University of West Alabama, North State Together in California, and El Paso ISD - will be invaluable and allow us to leverage existing structures to systematically engage the community, including amplifying student voices through surveys, interviews, and shadowing of students to experience their school day through their eyes. We have learned from our early-phase grant that early whole-school buy-in is essential. To expedite buy-in, we will provide comprehensive staff learning, implement a shared leadership structure, and facilitate pilots to generate wins that the whole school staff observes.

Strategy 2: Develop a regional capacity-building model to drive the scaling of the WCM and build local capacity to continue to spread the work to more schools beyond the grant

period. To achieve scale, in each region, we will train, empower, and certify local coaches as WCM Design Partners. The grant will fund 1.5 full-time equivalent positions to be shared in ways that make sense in light of the local context. For example, one local coach could serve as the lead coach and anchor for learning and knowledge dissemination while a second regional coach works in tandem with the lead coach to bolster support. A Transcend coach will support two demonstration/lab schools in every region, and local coaches will be responsible for supporting eight additional schools so that each region has ten schools in the RCT treatment group across two cohorts. To build the capacity of local coaches, Transcend will offer ongoing, job-embedded professional learning. The professional learning will include a *WCMv2* orientation consisting of a three-day experience delving into the model's foundational principles.

Additionally, local coaches will participate in a *WCMv2* residency with ongoing learning to deepen their understanding of model content and refine their skills where local coaches will have the chance to shadow Transcend coaches at their lab/demonstration schools, co-facilitate convenings with schools, and receive coaching, observations, and feedback from Transcend coaches. As coaches gain proficiency, Transcend will gradually reduce direct support, allowing coaches to assume greater responsibility and assuring community ownership in scaling the model. At the end of this process, at least 6 regional coaches (2 per partner region) will be certified by Transcend as WCM Design Partners.

Strategy 3: Expand the geographic reach of WCM to high-need, remote communities in multiple states to increase their local capacity and test the generalizability of the model. In this grant we will scale to three states, 11 counties, and 60 schools, impacting 19,959 students. Our early-phase grant focused on two urban high-need communities. This project will expand to two rural areas serving high-need students. Rural Alabama has a high percentage of Black

students whose families have historically experienced high levels of poverty. Our northern California partner supports very remote regions also with high poverty rates. Additionally, we will test the model in remote El Paso ISD which borders Mexico and has a very high percentage of students eligible for English language supports (For community demographics, see appendix JA.). These communities also bring tremendous assets such as strong pride and commitment to ensuring economic vitality for their youth and nimbleness of local governance. However, these areas have limited access to models such as *WCMv2* because of limited financial resources and geographic isolation. The mid-phase grant will allow us to scale the model to these three vastly different geographic regions, piloting a local capacity-building model that will allow them to sustain the work beyond the grant period and test the generalizability of the model.

Strategy 4: Develop a robust, open-source resource library accessible to grant participants and beyond, enabling any community to engage in a community design process to implement the WCM. *WCMv2* will continue to leverage Transcend’s rich platforms, systems and resources to support the ongoing development and codification of the model, knowledge management, and development of first-class resources. Specifically, Transcend will develop coaches’ guides and materials on individual practices that coaches can access to support implementing the WCM in their local schools and pilot of new practices. Transcend will also provide opportunities for in-person learning through our WCM orientation and a set of “immersion” which is an online or in-person training on one particular model strategy or practice. We will also provide virtual training sessions that will reduce travel costs and reduce costs for substitute teachers in remote areas to complement the robust face-to-face support. Together, these supports build the capacity of local communities to own, continue, and spread the work to more schools beyond the grant.

B.2 Management Plan: The management plan includes activities and milestones and responsible parties by the grant timeline. It includes activities for the project directors, project leads, local coaches, and the evaluation team. The project includes five major activities: **1) preparation for launch** and ongoing progress checks, **2) implement scale strategy - regional capacity building model**, **3) implement phase 1 program (build early conditions and coalition for the WCM)**, **4) implement phase 2 program (Advance & Spread the WCM)**, and **5) implement phase 3 program (Sustain the WCM)**. Please see Appendix JB for the full detailed overview of the management plan. Exhibit 3 below is only part of the management plan.

Exhibit 3: Activities/Milestones	Respon. Party*	Years** (1=Cohort 1; 2 = Cohort 2)				
		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5
*Roles: Project Co-Directors (PD), Project Lead (PL), Site Leads (SL), Local Coaches (C), External Evaluation Team (EE) ** Years: Y1=2025, Y2=2026, Y3=2027, Y4=2028, Y5=2029						
Preparation for LAUNCH						
Establish a leadership and advisory teams	PD, PL	X	X	X	X	X
Identify local coaches with partner regions	PD, PL	X				
Implement SCALE STRATEGY - Regional Capacity Building Model						
Conduct ongoing training for local coaches	PD, PL, SL	X	X	X	X	
Observe coaches and provide feedback	SL	X	X	X	X	X
Implement Phase 1 Program (Ignite the early conditions and coalition for the WCM)						
Transcend site leads support lab schools	PD, PL	1	1, 2	1, 2	1, 2	
Form design team for each school community	PD, PL	1	1, 2	1, 2	1, 2	
Regularly engage students, families, & educators	PD, PL	1	1, 2	1, 2	1, 2	
Provide professional learning & pilot CARE	PL, SL, C	1	1, 2	1, 2		
Implement Phase 2 Program (Advance & Spread the WCM)						
Phase in WCM practices schoolwide	PL, SL, C		1	1, 2	1, 2	1, 2
Convene stakeholders & share feedback to adjust implementation	PD, PL, C				1	1, 2
Implement Phase 3 Program (Sustain the WCM)						
Refine toolkits and materials	PD, PL	X	X	X	X	
Collect school-level data, including baseline & match schools	EE	1	1, 2	1, 2	1, 2	1, 2

Disseminate learnings with the field - papers, conferences, & social media campaigns	PD, PL, EE				X	X
Monthly Reporting	EE	X	X	X	X	X

B.3 Capacity: The **partnership** for this project assembles tremendous expertise and experience necessary to bring **WCMv2 to scale on a regional level**. **Transcend** is a \$30M a year national non-profit currently supporting over 100 school partnerships and 60,000+ students whose mission is to ensure equitable and extraordinary experiences and outcomes for all learners. We are in year two of implementing the WCM early-phase grant with positive formative and implementation data, no sample attrition, strong partner ratings, on-time reporting, and strong reviews by our DOE program officer. Additionally, we voluntarily and proactively audited our business practices with a third party to ensure alignment with federal grant reporting compliance. **The University of West Alabama, The Center for Rural Education (CRE)** is located in the heart of the Black Belt Region. CRE works to address critical issues such as rural poverty, teacher shortages, and community vitality across the South. CRE is a national leader in rural education as demonstrated by its flagship programs, including The Black Belt Teacher Corps, Teach for Alabama, and The Center for Rural Education as a few examples. **North State Together (NST)** is an anchor organization providing support to a ten-county collective impact network. NST guides the overall vision and strategy to increase regional vitality by increasing educational access and success. NST brings millions of dollars to the region to support cradle-to-career programming including the Regional K-16 Education Collaboratives Grant Program and the Rural to Rural Collaborative. **SRI** is our external evaluator and brings deep expertise in large, complex, mixed methods studies, including randomized controlled trials.

Leadership Team: Co-project directors from **Transcend** will be [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] will lead grant management, liaise with SRI on the evaluation, and manage reporting. [REDACTED] brings over 20 years of experience in education evaluation and research and 10+ years of experience managing and implementing \$120M+ in federal grants, including eight large-scale federal grants: two SEED, one EIR early-phase, three EIR/i3 mid-phase, and two EIR/i3 expansion grants. [REDACTED] has 25+ years in the field of education and 15+ years of experience building and leading top-performing teams; she was the founding principal at Van Ness ES in DCPS and developed the WCM with her community. She will be the senior advisor supporting grant implementation. She is a subject matter expert in the social and emotional learning skills and competencies needed by adults and students to create learning environments where every individual thrives. [REDACTED] will be the project lead. [REDACTED] brings over 17 years of experience in teaching, school leadership, and school design and redesign. She is a School Design Partner at Transcend and supports school communities in designing transformational learning environments. **SRI Senior Principal Researcher** [REDACTED], **Principal Researcher** [REDACTED], and **Senior Quantitative Analyst** [REDACTED] will design and carry out the RCT evaluation. Each brings more than 10 years of experience leading mixed-method impact evaluations. Collectively, they have led more than 10 current or recently concluded EIR/i3 evaluations. See key personnel’s allocations in Appendix JC and accompanying resumes in Appendix B.

Advisory Group: The advisory group is comprised of individuals with unique insights about their local contexts. The group will convene quarterly to share progress, surface challenges, and collectively problem-solve. The group will include [REDACTED] **who will represent the University of West Alabama’s Center for Rural Education.** She currently serves as the Dean

for the College of Education at the University of West Alabama. She has worked at the Center for Rural Education for the last nine years and serves as the Coordinator for the Rural Schools Collaborative Alabama hub. [REDACTED] is the Superintendent of our partner district, Sumter School District, AL. He has 20+ years of experience in education, especially schools supporting rural learners. [REDACTED], Dean of Extended Education, Shasta College, will represent North State Together. He is the Dean of Extended Education and is responsible for supervising operations at the satellite campuses. He has deep experience in bringing community stakeholders together to advocate and ensure educational opportunities for students in the region's most remote areas. [REDACTED], Chief of Organizational Transformation and Equity, El Paso ISD, as the first appointed equity officer on the EPISD cabinet, will represent the interests and strategy of the district ensuring the project meets local needs.

Implementation: Transcend staff will lead implementation. [REDACTED], Co-project Director, is responsible for overall grant implementation and allocated 15% FTE. [REDACTED], Co-project Director, is responsible for site recruitment, study implementation, and grant reporting and allocated 20% FTE. Project Lead, [REDACTED], is responsible for directly managing the project team, monitoring progress, and adjusting our strategy and allocated 70%. Each site has a Site Lead allocated 80% and is responsible for providing direct support to lab schools and providing coaching support to local coaches. SRI will design and carry out the RCT, implementation, and scaling studies. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are allocated 10% FTE and [REDACTED] is allocated 5%, totaling 25% FTE for SRI. See Appendix B for resumes.

B.4 Dissemination of information: Transcend values widely sharing learnings and has a robust history of doing so. We have built a strong approach to producing open-source knowledge products and thought leadership that are broadcast across our networks and the field. We will

broadly disseminate findings and support replication, through: first-hand experiences through inspiration visits, social media, conferences and publications, and an open-source library.

Experiencing the WCM: We have learned that one of the most powerful dissemination approaches is for educators, policymakers, and funders to experience the WCM through first-hand inspiration visits. These half-day visits allow stakeholders to experience the qualitatively different and inspiring learning environment that the WCM creates and allows us to engage personally with these key stakeholders to help them understand the power and import of the model. A past visitor, reflecting on her visit, said: "I am taking away hope. It gave me hope to see how excited the school leaders are and to see the students' sense of belonging and their joy in learning. It reminded me of why I went into education." Each region will have two "demonstration" sites that will build the capacity to host these visits regularly. Additionally, school partners will have the chance to visit one of our demonstration sites in DC or Aldine.

Social Media: Together with our partners, we will use our significant social media reach including Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, newsletters, and earned media opportunities (including both education-related and non-education outlets) to share regular updates, learnings, and results throughout the grant. Combined, these sites have more than 150,000 unique users accessing our websites over 250,000 times this year. Transcend alone had over 580,000 views across our social media content in 2023. Additionally, Transcend has a robust 16,000+ member open online network, the Transcend Community (TC), where we regularly post learnings and share resources. Transcend newsletters are widely viewed with open rates far exceeding the non-profit standard.²⁰ On a state and regional level, our partners' newsletters reach district and school leaders in their states and regions creating a national, regional, and local network for dissemination. Finally, we will also use our organizational capacity and media reach to produce

and disseminate full WCM media campaigns, including a compelling professional video describing the program and results with accompanying webinars to allow for discussion and interaction. For examples of media campaigns we've launched, see appendix JD.

Conferences and Publications: Transcend and our partners will present at local, regional, and national conferences for practitioners and researchers (e.g., Learning and the Brain, National Rural Education Association, American Educational Research Association, CASEL, North State Together Annual Summit). Finally, our goal is to generate rich data from this project that we will submit to journals (e.g. Child Development and Journal of Research in Rural Education).

Open-Source Resource Library: To uphold our mission to create and share usable knowledge with the field as a public good, we have built a strong infrastructure to produce open-source knowledge products and thought leadership resources. For an example of an open-source knowledge product, see our mental health practices and resources in Appendix JE. Resources for the WCM will be housed at www.wholechildmodel.org and our partners will have links to this rich library of resources on their websites. To date, we have well over 500 open-source assets available for use by all. We will add our facilitator and participant guides to this collection to provide schools and communities beyond grant participants access to the WCM.

B.5 Utility of the Products: We envision two important types of products resulting from this investment that will both build local communities' capacity to implement the model and generally build the field's understanding of effective practices to support the whole child. The first is a robust set of resources to help others implement the model in their local contexts. The second type will be products to build field knowledge. The first group includes **Implementation Toolkits** to be used by educators to guide the rollout of key practices and allow for local adaptation. The toolkits will be standalone resources that any school seeking to improve student

experience could access. As part of this group of products, we will convene a **summer orientation** to build and support a growing network of educators committed to educating and supporting the whole child. The institute will ground educators in the foundational research of the model and give them an overview of critical practices they can then use in their communities. The orientation will bring the toolkits to life.

The second type of products includes **journal articles, conference presentations, and media content** which will allow us to share findings and build an understanding of what works with a wide range of audiences with different levels of expertise. The evaluation findings from this project will identify in which contexts the *WCMv2* is most effective, with emphasis on racial, socio-economic, and geographic diversity. The variety of audiences for the study's products ensures the learnings will be shared widely with educators, community members and partners, researchers, policymakers, and funders.

C. QUALITY OF THE DESIGN: C.1 Conceptual Framework: Exhibit 4. Provides the conceptual framework of *WCMv2*. (See Appendix G for a more detailed logic model.).

Exhibit 4. Conceptual Framework

Program Model		Mediators	Outcomes
Key Components	Direct Components		
<p>Regional Capacity Building (Scaling strategies) Transcend coaches support development of local regional coaches through: Direct training, Shadowing, Coaching</p> <p>WCM Toolkit (open source)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitator guides for trainings Teacher/staff facing resources to support implementation and training <p>Implementation Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WCM coach (either Transcend or regional) assigned to each school <p>Professional Learning/Training for School Staff</p>	<p>Community Design Process to build local ownership and contextualization</p> <p>CARE schoolwide practices that create a safe, connected environment for children and adults (Tier 1 Strategies)</p> <p>BOOST/Strategies to reduce exclusionary practices (Tier 2 & 3 Supports)</p> <p>Family Circle practices to help families from all backgrounds feel valued to support students</p> <p>Improvement cycles to gather student voice data for improving practices of CARE, BOOST and Family Circles</p>	<p>Changes in school culture</p> <p>Increased adult sense of well-being</p> <p>Changes in staff SEL knowledge & beliefs</p> <p>Student well-being</p> <p>Family connectedness</p>	<p>Student behavior (proximal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced disciplinary events Increased attendance <p>Student SEL competencies (proximal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-management Perseverance Self-efficacy Social awareness <p>Teachers (distal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher retention <p>Student learning (distal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved ELA achievement Improved math achievement

C.2 Goals, objectives, and outcomes are specified and measurable: *WCMv2* has six goals, with multiple objectives presented in Exhibit 5. All objectives include a deliverable or outcome target to demonstrate achieving the objective. Please see Appendix JF for full details of objectives, this exhibit only presents high-level goals, objectives, and outcomes/deliverables.

Exhibit 5: Goals, Objectives, & SAMPLE Outcomes/Deliverable
<p>Goal 1: Develop materials and resources to support coach development and to populate a robust library of open-source resources for use beyond the grant and as a public good.</p>
<p>Obj 1A. Develop/refine training material to support local coach development [Deliverable: Participant guides] [Deliverable: Turnkey toolkits and pilot guides] [Deliverable: IDEA compliant materials available ccbync on the WCM website]</p>
<p>Goal 2: Build enduring capacity by training local coaches to support implementation.</p>
<p>Obj 2A. Refine professional learning to support local coach development [Outcome: 80% session attendance for named topics] [Outcome: 80% local coach attendance at convenings and design team meetings] Obj 2B. Provide opportunities for structured practice and planning [Outcome: local coaches receive 3 observations with feedback] [Outcome: 2+ certified Whole Child Design Partners in each region]</p>

Goal 3: Implement a community design process that centers on student needs.
Obj 3A. Center community needs, with a focus on understanding students’ perspectives: [Outcome: 80% response rate on student surveys and student and family interviews] Obj. 3B. Annually, reassess student needs by centering student's voice [Outcome: 80% response rate on student surveys and student and family interviews]
Goal 4: Generate shared ownership by creating school design teams to engage staff and pilot local adaptations.
Obj 4A. Support the school design team to create a community vision for the work. [Outcome: 80% staff attendance at trainings] Obj 4B. Create pilot classrooms using Tier 1 strategies for inspiration [Outcome: Pilot teachers receive 2 observations with feedback]
Goal 5: Deepen educator knowledge to spread student well-being to the whole school.
Obj 5A. Expand WCM practices schoolwide [Outcome: teachers receive 3 observations with feedback] [Outcome: 80% of teachers review Leaps survey data and student interview data] Obj 5B. Build Design Team capacity to spread practices using community design cycles [Outcome: 90% of design teams conduct 3 data stepbacks per year]
Goal 6: Sustain staff and student well-being by implementing the practices that lead to developing social and emotional, academic skills, and key teacher outcomes.
Obj 6. Contribute to an evidence base documenting extraordinary and equitable outcomes, WCM schools demonstrate the following outcomes: Positive statistically significant difference in teacher retention, student SEL skills and learning Statistically significant reduction in absenteeism, OSS, teacher turnover.

C.3 The design of our project will successfully address the needs of the students attending our partner schools. The *WCMv2* targets elementary schools (grades K-5) in three diverse regions: Alabama, California, and Texas. Through our regional partnerships, we will work with six rural counties and an isolated urban district bordering Mexico. A significant percentage of participating students in these regions are high-need, low-income, and Black, Latino, and English Learners. The section below describes national trends and the needs of our targeted population

and then provides the rationale demonstrating how the WCM will meet these needs. We have highlighted the specific needs of rural, Latino, and Black communities where the effects of the pandemic have been exacerbated (particularly for high-poverty communities). Our project builds on our early-phase EIR and scales to new geographies and demographics.

Nationally, the mental health, engagement, and academic performance of students in the U.S. has declined dramatically from pre-pandemic estimates. Rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidality have doubled.²¹ This trend is more severe in children and adolescents from low-income backgrounds and youth of color.²² With 1 in 5 youth now experiencing a mental health disorder, many professional and government organizations, including the U.S. Surgeon General, have declared a national state of emergency in youth mental health.²³ Rural youth are more likely than the national average to report experiencing post-pandemic stress (29% rural/18.9% national average). Finally, an abundance of research has documented the increase in learning loss and learning gaps due to the pandemic as demonstrated by this headline, “Two decades of progress, nearly gone: National math, reading scores hit historic lows.”²⁴

The needs of our target population are a reflection of these national trends. Our partner sites demonstrate high needs across a variety of factors including mental health, attendance, and learning and our partners support more high-need students compared to state averages with attendance and prior academic achievement that on average lags state rates. Please see Appendix J for summary table (Appendix JA) and more research on the target population needs (JG).

The *WCMv2*'s community design process is designed to address the needs of our target population and applies practices and strategies reviewed by the WWC and found to have strong evidence of positive impact (see the Evidence Form). Our process ensures that both student and teacher voices are heard. In addition, the WCM research base is grounded in the neurosequential

model, relationship and trauma theory, and restorative practices theory (see Section A for more detail). The educator-tested model integrates Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) throughout the school day. To address the isolation, stress, and PD needs of teachers in high-poverty and rural districts, the mid-phase grant will connect teachers and support them to implement a tested model, high-quality resources, and implementation guides, virtual and in-person professional development, and local coaching that will allow the work in these diverse settings to continue.

D. QUALITY OF THE PROJECT EVALUATION: Transcend will contract with SRI to conduct an independent evaluation of *WCMv2* to assess its implementation, cost, and the impact on teachers and students. The proposed evaluation features a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design comparing elementary schools that have adopted *WCMv2* to elementary schools within the same region operating under business as usual conditions. The proposed evaluation has the potential to demonstrate impact based on strong evidence, as the study sample will include approximately 10,000 students from 60 elementary schools in diverse rural and urban contexts. SRI will provide feedback on implementation annually and will study the implementation of Transcend’s regional capacity-building activities as a scaling strategy.

The evaluation will address the following questions: Main (confirmatory) impact: Does school-wide adoption of *WCMv2* result in: (1) improved student attendance (including reductions in chronic absenteeism) and behavior? (2) improved student SEL competencies (self-management, grit, self-efficacy, and social awareness)? (3) improved student achievement in math and ELA? (4) improved teacher retention? Moderation: (5) Do these impacts differ by student, teacher, or school characteristics? Mediation: (6) How does teacher and student well-being mediate the impacts of *WCMv2* on teacher and student outcomes? Implementation: (7) Are the core components of *WCMv2* implemented with fidelity within schools and sites? (8) How

does implementation differ across schools? Cost: (9) What are the ingredients required to implement *WCMv2*, and what is the cost-effectiveness ratio? Scaling: (10) To what extent does the *WCMv2* regional capacity building model support development of regional coaches? What are the facilitators/challenges to implementing the *WCMv2* regional capacity-building model?

D.1 Addressing What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards without Reservations: The

confirmatory impact analysis is designed to meet WWC group design standards without reservations using an RCT design.²⁵ SRI will randomly assign 30 elementary schools to the treatment group (10 in each site) and 30 to the control group (10 in each site). The first cohort of 15 treatment schools will begin implementing *WCMv2* in fall 2025 (after pre-implementation planning in spring 2025 and randomization in summer 2025), and the second cohort of 15 treatment schools will start implementation in fall 2026 (after planning in spring 2026 and randomization in summer 2006). As a main (confirmatory) impact analysis, SRI will estimate the impact of *WCMv2* on teacher and student outcomes after the third year of implementation in both cohorts, when teachers will have adopted CARE, Boost, and Family Circle strategies schoolwide. This analysis will combine outcomes across cohorts and across years to maximize sample size. As an exploratory analysis, SRI will also estimate *WCMv2* impacts on teachers and students in both cohorts at the end of the first year of implementation (when schools will have completed a pilot of CARE strategies). All teachers and students in pilot classrooms will be included in this initial, exploratory outcomes analysis. SRI will also estimate the impact of *WCMv2* on teachers and students at the end of the sustainability phase in Cohort 1 schools as an additional exploratory analysis (Cohort 2 will not be available before the end of the grant).

All planned teacher and student outcome measures are considered eligible under the WWC Study Review Protocol, version 5.0.²⁶ Outcome data will be drawn from extant datasets

maintained by the study districts or state longitudinal data systems and from student surveys administered for this evaluation. Data will be collected identically across treatment and control conditions. Student-level outcomes include state standardized assessments of math and ELA achievement, student attendance, including rates of chronic absenteeism, and disciplinary outcomes (e.g., in-school and out-of-school suspensions) archived in district databases, and measures of student SEL competencies as measured by Panorama items on student surveys administered by SRI. The teacher-level outcome will be retention in school.

SRI will closely monitor overall and differential attrition rates at the school and student levels throughout the study period. To minimize attrition, SRI will support Transcend's recruitment and communication with school leaders to ensure that participants are fully informed about the study prior to random assignment, develop relationships with each regional program team, and communicate frequently throughout the study period to prevent school-level attrition from the RCT. To enlist schools' support for the administration of student surveys and minimize school-level and classroom-level attrition from this outcome measure, SRI will recruit school-based survey coordinators to support survey administration and will provide school-level incentives after each wave of data collection. Two weeks after each wave of surveys closes, SRI will provide schools with school-level reports summarizing their data, including scores on aggregate measures and item-level descriptives. SRI has used these same strategies in another EIR evaluation and achieved response rates that were within the WWC boundaries for attrition.

Impacts on students: SRI will examine the impact of *WCMv2* on student outcomes, including student learning, SEL competencies, attendance, and behavior. To capture student learning, SRI will collect student-level test scores on state assessments in math and ELA. To assess impacts on SEL outcomes, SRI will administer a student survey with measures of self-

management, perseverance, self-efficacy, and social awareness developed by Panorama Education; the measures range in reliability from 0.73 to 0.90 (see Appendix JH). To assess behavior and attendance, SRI will collect administrative data from study districts. *Sample:* The analytic sample for the confirmatory impact analyses will include all students in grades 3 to 5 in the study schools in 2027-28 for Cohort 1 and in 2028-29 for Cohort 2. Because student joiners pose a low risk of bias to the proposed design (a school-level RCT evaluating a teacher intervention), joiners will be included in the analytic sample for student outcomes (WWC Standards, 5.0, Figure 8). *Analysis:* School-by-grade level aggregate test scores from spring 2025 and 2026 and student surveys administered in fall 2025 and 2026 will serve as the baseline for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools, respectively. Student-level test scores from spring 2028 and spring 2029 will be the outcomes estimating *WCMv2*'s impact on student achievement after the third year of implementation in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools, respectively. SEL measures on student surveys administered in fall 2027 and fall 2028 will estimate *WCMv2*'s impact on student SEL after two years of implementation (Transcend's theory of action holds that shorter-term impacts on student SEL will lead to longer-term impacts on other student outcomes). SRI will pool data across sites and across cohorts to conduct the impact analysis. The analysis will use a two-level hierarchical model with student and school levels, with *WCMv2* program impacts estimated at the school level. Additional models will add interaction terms to examine the potential differential impact of *WCMv2* on different students and schools (see Appendix JH for detail). For outcomes falling under the same domain, SRI will compute the domain-level average effect size and statistical significance. *Power:* The minimum detectable effect size (MDES) is 0.16 for math/ELA achievement and 0.23 for SEL outcomes, assuming 175 grade 3-5 students per school (for the achievement outcome) and 81 students in grades 4-5 (for the SEL outcomes)

in 60 treatment and control schools (with half in treatment, see Appendix JH for additional assumptions and power calculations).²⁷

Impacts on teachers: SRI will examine the impact of *WCMv2* on teacher retention.

Sample: All general education teachers in treatment and control schools at baseline will be included in the teacher analytic sample (teacher joiners will be not included because they pose a high risk of biasing this design; WWC Standards, 5.0, Figure 8). SRI will collect administrative data on teacher retention for the 2025-26 through 2028-29 school years from all study schools.

Analysis: SRI will analyze the impact of *WCMv2* on teacher outcomes after the third year of implementation, using fall 2028 and fall 2029 retention data for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 teachers, respectively. SRI will pool data across sites and across cohorts to conduct the impact analysis.

SRI will use a two-level hierarchical model with teacher and school levels, with the treatment effect estimated at the school level (see Appendix JH). *Power:* The MDSES for teacher retention is 0.24, assuming an average of 25 teachers each in 60 schools (with half in treatment, see Appendix JH for additional power calculations and assumptions).

D.2 Guidance on Effective Strategies Suitable for Replication or Testing: The evaluation is designed to provide guidance to support replication and testing of *WCMv2* by other schools through an implementation study. SRI's implementation study will describe the intervention's core components (e.g., professional learning, CARE strategies) and report on fidelity and variation in the implementation of the key program components (described in section D.3) to support replication of the components as implemented in the evaluation. To further understand and explain variation in the implementation of *WCMv2*, SRI will also conduct interviews with site leads, coaches (both Transcend staff and regional coaches), and treatment school staff in the 4 study years (2025–26, 2026–27, 2027–28, 2028–29). SRI will select a purposeful sample of 9

schools in each year across sites, representing treatment schools with both high- and low-fidelity implementation, based on implementation fidelity data, school staff survey data, and recommendations from Transcend’s program leads. Within each school, SRI will interview the principal, design team members, and non-design team teachers. SRI will also observe regional training and interview Transcend coaches, regional coaches and site staff to assess implementation of Transcend’s scaling strategies, and identify challenges and facilitators to scaling *WCMv2* in rural schools by regional partners agencies. See Appendix JH for a description of qualitative research methods.

Moderator Analysis. SRI will conduct a moderator analysis to understand for whom and in what settings *WCMv2* is effective. At the student level, SRI will examine variation in impacts by demographic characteristics (age, gender, race/ethnicity, free and reduced-price lunch status, multilingual learner status, special education status) and baseline achievement and attendance. At the teacher level, SRI will examine variation by teacher grade level. At the school level, SRI will examine variation by region, percentage of multilingual learners, and school size.

Cost Effectiveness. SRI will conduct a cost effectiveness study to evaluate the benefit of *WCMv2* against the costs. For both the treatment and control groups, SRI will collect cost information using the ingredients method (Levin & McEwan, 2001). SRI will identify each program input through a review of documents and a series of implementation interviews. Based on these data, SRI will define a list of program components, or ingredients, from which to determine incremental costs. Using data collected from individual sites, publicly available data, and resources such as the “Cost Out” tool developed by Columbia’s Teachers College, SRI will determine the value of resources required for implementation. SRI’s analysis will calculate cost

effectiveness ratios to aid comparisons of the cost effectiveness of *WCMv2* to other interventions.

D.3. Articulation of Key Project Components, Mediators, Outcomes, and Measurable

Threshold for Acceptable Implementation: The evaluation will be guided by the *WCMv2* conceptual framework (see section C.1) which clearly articulates the project’s components, mediators, and outcomes.

Measurable Threshold for Acceptable Implementation and Key Project Components. For each key component, SRI will collaborate with Transcend staff to establish meaningful and measurable indicators of implementation and thresholds for high, medium, and low implementation fidelity for each (see Exhibit J4.1 in Appendix JH for a representative selection of indicators aligned to key program components). Data sources for measures of implementation fidelity will include program records, including attendance at training, artifacts such as design team plans, and coach observation records. SRI researchers will observe key professional learning sessions in each site and SRI will also administer a staff survey twice during the RCT period (see Appendix JH for more detail).

Mediators. The conceptual framework shows that enhanced teacher and student well-being will lead to improved teacher and student outcomes. SRI will conduct mediation analyses to assess the degree to which teacher and student well-being mediates the impact of *WCMv2*. Data on teacher and student well-being will come from established Panorama measures included on staff and student surveys (see Appendix JH for evidence of validity and reliability).

Outcomes. SRI will collect a rich suite of outcome data (outcomes described in D.1) aligned to both the conceptual framework and the current WWC Study Review Protocol (2023). This alignment will allow for findings relevant to the project and captured by “common

measures,” as called for by IES’s Standards for Excellence in Education Research (SEER). Common measures are not just valid and reliable, but also widely used, allowing for comparison of effect sizes between interventions that target similar outcomes.

Formative Reporting to Transcend and Partner Sites: SRI will analyze and report implementation fidelity measures for all sites and schools participating in the intervention in each year of the 4-year study. This fidelity reporting, coupled with the site visits described above, will form the basis of the evaluation’s annual formative reporting to Transcend partner sites, supporting mid-course corrections in program design and delivery and informing efforts to codify and replicate the model beyond the grant period. In addition to supporting annual reporting on implementation fidelity to site-level stakeholders, SRI will prepare a formative memo for Transcend after each round of site visits. Findings from this qualitative analysis will be used to interpret and explain implementation fidelity measures, to describe Transcend’s scaling strategies and their implementation, and to guide replication of the model after the grant period.