



“Students don’t care what you know until they know that you care”

is a widely accepted expression about teaching. **We Care Schools (WCS)** move this truth from teachers caring alone to school communities *caring together*. **WCS’s** enhance the learning environment by adapting principles and practices of **Community Renewal International’s (CR) Relational Foundation model**. **WCS** began in the 2018-19 school year as a collaborative initiative between **University Elementary (UES)** and **CR Institute**. We have created a community of practice to scale **WCS**.

Creating a *school culture of caring* prioritizes and brings intention to an important human reality: “*caring relationships are our most valuable and value-creating resource*” (Robert Hall). What will it look like when caring relationships support our learning, our diversity, our conflicts, our opportunities and our whole system(s) of community? **We Care Schools** engage our imaginations to discover answers through the *power of caring together*.

During the successful **WCS** pilot at pre-K to 5th grade **University Elementary (UES)** in Caddo Parish (2018-19), *educators, students, parents and school partners* were guided to pursue an outcome: ‘*We are creating pathways to a school culture of caring as the foundation for learning and community.*’

UES WCS pilot was officially accepted as a Tier 1 [Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports](#) (PBIS) plan. Predictably, *creating a culture of caring improves behavior patterns* (teachers, students, parents). During focus groups, *teachers described how WCS has positively impacted their teaching and student learning*.

Based on the pilot, **WCS** enhances the school learning and teaching environments. It provides foundational preparation for students to pursue meaning and purpose in community. Prioritizing relational and community outcomes addresses unintended consequences of the current education paradigm. Research reveals alarming increases in loneliness-related poor health and well-being outcomes among millennials and generation ‘Z’.

Brain Science, Behavioral Sciences, Health Sciences, and Educational Research all point to the importance of caring relationships and community as critical factors for individual health and well-being. **WCS** *applies this research in fun creative practices that empower and celebrate caring together*.

Creating a school culture of caring is both a strategy and an outcome that is unique to relational connectedness within each school community. After 5 years of developing the **UES** culture of caring, data is revealing positive patterns of change. Significant gains in behavior, attendance, teacher satisfaction / retention, and last year test score gains are attributable to the **UES** culture. The culture of caring provides a framework, or toolbox, for aligning and adding new programs that grow relational capacities of the **UES** caring culture. ACE’s training, TBRI, VYJ Crisis Response, Restorative Justice, Strategic Doing and Growing Greener are examples of adding new tools / skills that are growing capacities of the UES caring culture. For additional information or to become a **WCS**, contact **CR Institute** director, [Kim Mitchell](#) (318-425-3222).





Guiding Questions for becoming a We Care School

The primary outcome for We Care Schools is a school culture of caring as the foundation for learning and community. Here are some questions to guide in creating your learning while doing action plan:

1. **Imagine** *educators, students, parents, school partners and school staff starting and creating pathways and pathfinding initiatives to move toward that school culture of caring individually and collectively? What will that look like at your school? What does starting energy look like? What does it look like to sustain that level of energy throughout the school year?*
2. **How will** *schoolwide leadership skills encourage seeing the good in others? What will it look like when the school community is helping each other find their gifts and purpose in community?*
3. **Imagine** *a safe place and guidance for teachers to regularly meet to specifically encourage each other with positive stories of their experiences and experiments creating the school culture of caring? What will it look like to create a school schedule that prioritizes these gatherings in a manner that connects teachers across grade levels?*
4. **What will it look like** *when students connect across grade levels with an outcome of younger students looking up to older students as role models, while older students look after and encourage younger students?*
5. **What will it look like** *to structure **coopetition** within your school community? Based upon the pilot We Care School, structuring a game of competing in cooperating strengthens community.*
6. **What will it look like** *to experiment applying Community Renewal principles and practices schoolwide and in the classroom? For example: whole person, village framework, Renewal Team, Block Leaders...*
7. **Imagine** *that the school culture of caring is spreading to home and neighborhoods, positively changing the community. What will that look like? How will we strengthen the school connection to the surrounding community?*
8. **What if** *the outcomes for education clearly expressed contributions to positive community outcomes, what does that look like? How will we express that narrative?*
9. **Imagine** *all added educational program skills are aligned and evaluated by their contributions to growing the relational capacities of the school culture of caring, what does that look like? For example, adding ACE's, TBRI, Strategic Doing, Restorative Justice, Growing Greener...*
10. **How will we** *document and measure your progress and stories of creating a school culture of caring? What does that look like?*

