

**Whole Child Observation Tool**  
**Practitioner Manual**

*Created by the DU-DPS Research-Practice Partnership on School Discipline*

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## Introduction

**What is the tool?** The Whole Child Observation Tool is an assessment of school staff members' use of practice strategies and approaches commonly implemented within Denver Public Schools related to discipline, social-emotional learning, and school culture. It is made up of 7 observational categories of general practices that are often utilized by teachers, administrators, and other school staff in and outside the classroom.

**Why was it created?** For the last four years, DPS and DU have partnered to strengthen the connections between research and practice in the area of school discipline. A theme from our conversations with educators is that suspension rates alone do not provide a complete picture of a school's culture and behavior systems. Stakeholders want district evaluations to incorporate school practices in addition to student outcomes. Similarly, the strategic goals of the Whole Child, Healthy Child Agenda 2020 require the assessment of school-wide social emotional learning approaches that are not currently captured by existing information systems. The Whole Child Observation Tool responds to the interests of building leaders and district partners in developing new ways to measure school practices.

**Who should use it?** This tool was developed for OSEL partners assisting schools with planning related to Whole Child initiatives, but can also be used by school leaders within their own sites, or by individuals observing practices in other schools.

**How will this tool help me?** In an era of school discipline reform where educators are increasingly asked to document what they do to support students and build a positive school culture, this tool can help educators easily generate data about the work happening inside school buildings. For example, the type of information this tool will collect may be useful for meetings with an Instructional Superintendent, or sections of a Unified Improvement Plan related to student culture, opportunities to learn, and staff development.

**How do I use it?** At least *three observations* should be conducted in multiple school settings in order to fully utilize this tool. We recommend the observations last 60 minutes and be completed in three distinct spaces on campus: a classroom, the front office, and the office of a school staff member focused on discipline, school culture, or social-emotional learning (e.g. dean, restorative practices coordinator, or vice principal).

## Using the Tool

School staff utilize a wide range of strategies to establish their school culture, support students' social-emotional development, and prevent exclusionary or punitive outcomes. This tool measures a sub-set of 7 categories of practices that are commonly employed in DPS schools. The tool is designed to document evidence of practices used by adults; it is not intended to capture student outcomes or behavior.

The Whole Child Observation consists of 7 observational categories, each with 3 common practices and a space to note additional practices that may be relatively unique to the school. Practices are rated by the frequency with which they occur, using a 3 point scale.

### ***Rating Scale***

0 = Unobserved Practice. No interactions between students and staff involved this practice.

1 = Infrequent Practice. 1-2 interactions between students and staff involved this practice.

2 = Common Practice. 3 or more interactions between students and staff involved this practice.

Not observable or applicable (n/a) = It is not expected that this practice would be used in this setting (e.g. a student support team meeting would not be observed during a classroom observation)

Notes = Area for anecdotal notes and examples that provide rationale for score.

An interaction is defined as a single unit of exchange between a staff member and student(s).

### ***Entering and Scoring***

Place a numerical score in the boxes to the right of the subheading and write examples, descriptions, or quotes of the interactions observed in the notes box. Enter a 0 in all sections not observed, unless the category is not applicable to the school space in which you observed.

Once your observation is complete, tally the score for each category of practices by adding up each column and then totalling the final row. Please note: because punitive and exclusionary strategies are not recommended per board policy, this category of practices is *reverse scored*. In other words, seeing these practices with greater frequency leads to a lower score. Once each category of practices has been scored, add the total values to the summary table.

## Observational Categories

### *Relationship Building*

Practices for building relationships between school staff and students or their families/caregivers::

- **Greeting students** by name. This often takes place while staff members are standing in the hallway during breaks.
- **Signs or actions of solidarity** include fist bumps, high fives, snaps, shaking hands, hand on shoulder, or pat on back.
- **Using students' native language.**
- **Inquiries** into students' lives and interests, "how was dinner last night, did you watch the game?"
- **Extending empathy** to students. When school staff members communicate to students that they are understanding of students' situations/feelings, e.g., "It must be difficult trying to study while listening to your parents fighting."
- **Positive contact** and communication with students' family or caregivers (email, phone call, visiting the house)
- **Connections with community** businesses and organizations. For example, inviting local speakers, hosting organizations like GRASP, GREAT, Denver Kids on campus.
- **Family engagement** activities (open houses, fall festivals, etc.)
- **Student clubs** or groups such as La Raza, GSA, band, Leadership, etc.
- **Recognitions of student accomplishments** or leadership on display throughout the building (e.g. art, photos, awards, student exhibitions or showcases)

### *Restorative Practices*

Practices that involve the following key components:

1. **Sharing multiple perspectives** on a discipline incident or conflict.
    - "What do you think happened?" "Why did it happen?" "What's going on?" "What's the story?"
  2. **Identifying who was harmed** in the incident.
    - "Who was harmed?" "Who was affected?" "How do you feel about the situation?"
  3. **Reflecting on and taking a piece of responsibility** for causing harm.
    - "Can you accept your part of the responsibility?" or "What part are you responsible for?" "What could you have done differently?" "What part of this situation is yours?"
  4. **Problem-solving to repair the harm** or fix the problem.
    - "What can we do to restore the relationship?" or "How can we fix this?" "What needs to happen to make things right/get on the right track?" "What do you think is the solution?"
    - Mentions of "reparation," or "repairing the harm" or "rebuilding relationships"
- **Dialogues or conversations.** Short and informal conversations between students and staff that involve the above key components or questions.
  - **Reflection or refocus** forms used to facilitate restorative dialogues.
  - **Peace circles.** Students sitting in a circle after a moderately serious incident, educators running a structured and/or scripted meeting involving students and community that incorporate the above key components.
  - **Re-entry meetings** focused on restoring the student to the community, using the above key components or questions.

### ***Behavioral Recognitions, Reminders, Redirects***

Practices that focus on student compliance with school rules and expectations:

- **Positive narration** in which adults make concrete and specific statements to reinforce expectations (e.g. "Brittanie, I see you over there writing quietly").
- **Reminding** students to follow rules or procedure.
- **Redirecting** students through disincentives (e.g. losing bucks, points, or tickets) or warnings that are part of a standard set of consequences (e.g. three strikes and you stay in for recess) to correct students when they are off-task or don't comply with directions. (e.g. "Jolena, you know you have to keep your hands to yourself. I'm moving you to red.")
- **Rewarding** students for following rules through positive feedback (e.g. Good job on dress code today) or distributing incentives (earning bucks, points, tickets).
- **Recognizing** students based on their accrual of points, bucks, or other incentives for compliance to school rules and procedures (e.g. person who earned the most bucks for attendance).
- **Signals** to gain the attention of groups of students (e.g. gimme 5, raising one hand, clapping or snapping in a rhythm, ringing a chime, or chants like "1-2-3, eyes on me").
- **"The look"** where staff indicate to students with their eyes that they're doing things "right" or "wrong."

### ***Social Emotional Skill Building***

Practices that build student social and emotional competencies:

- **Visuals** related to school-wide expectations, character traits, learner profiles, personal success factors, or core values
- **Explicit instruction** (including demonstration, student observations, and student practice) on how to follow school rules and procedures, or how to demonstrate the school's core values, character traits, "learner profile," or interpersonal norms (e.g. be respectful).
- **Integration of values into lessons.** When teachers and other adults reference the school's core values, character traits, or learner profile when asking a student to complete a task or as part of an academic lesson.
- **Classroom rules, group norms, or agreements** developed with students.
- **Consequences** that are tied to the students' behavior (e.g. student has to help clean up vandalism, trash or food messes to which they contributed).
- **Whole class, grade-level, or whole-school meetings** (often called morning meetings) that give students an opportunity to share celebrations, stories, events, and feelings about themselves; that engage in a community-building activity (e.g. team building or get-to-know-you games); that recognize students' accomplishments and strengths that do relate to the school's core values, or character traits.

### ***Student Support Services***

Non-punitive practices in response to concerns about students that are not captured elsewhere, including:

- **Check-ins** with individual students to follow up on past issues, monitor progress, or provide case management.
- **Team meetings** when groups of school staff come together to review behavioral data, identify or adapt interventions and other support services for students (e.g. Student Intervention Teams, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Response to Intervention).
- **Small group** interventions that target a select number of students who share a particular concern or area of improvement.

- **Referral to or provision of student-specific interventions**, therapy, mental health care, and case management.

### *Awareness of Racial Inequalities and Bias*

- **Visual displays of diversity** or cultural awareness. Posters, artwork, photographs or other visuals with diverse students/countries of origin, quotes from people of color, depictions of historical or present social movements led by people of color, and commentary on discrimination and prejudice.
- **Diversity among staff members.** Teachers, school leaders, and other staff members who share the same racial background as students in the school.
- **Discussions about racial dynamics at the school.** Conversations about the influence of racial background or racism on relationships between school community members.
- **Explicitly referring to racial categories**, culture, oppression, diversity, equity, bias, prejudice, or discrimination, along with professional learning opportunities focused on these topics.
- **Intentional outreach** to caregivers of color.
- **Examining data** or patterns for impact on different racial groups, personnel decisions and discipline data by racial subgroups.
- **Identity based student groups** like La Raza or Black Student union
- **Community events** focused on race-related issues, e.g. Hosting ‘know your rights’ trainings regarding immigration; Black history month celebrations.
- **Discussions with students** or course assignments about their experiences as a student of a particular racial group, sharing experiences based around race, acknowledging structural obstacles students encounter based on racism.

### *Punitive and Exclusionary Practices*

Practices that involve assigning penalties or consequences that take students outside of the classroom.

- **Sending students out** of the classroom, issuing office discipline referrals or behavioral referrals.
- **In-school suspension (ISS)** circumstances in which students are removed from the classroom as punishment, but remain on campus in a separate space.
- **In-School Intervention Room (ISIR)** is a space in which students who are receiving an in-school suspension get extra support and guidance until they can return to the classroom.
- **Detention** or Saturday School, a.k.a. “After-School Refocus” or “College Prep”.
- **Out-of-school suspension (OSS)** is the practice of sending students home as a form of “reset” and punishment for misbehavior.

### Whole Child Observation Tool

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Start: \_\_\_\_\_

Time End: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>RELATIONSHIP BUILDING</b>	Un-observed (0)	Infrequent (1)	Common (2)	N/A	Notes
Greeting students by name					
Signs of solidarity					
Speaking students' native languages					
Other (see manual):					
Total score	+	+		=	

<b>RESTORATIVE PRACTICES</b>	Un-observed (0)	Infrequent (1)	Common (2)	N/A	Notes
Restorative dialogues or conversations					
Restorative reflection or refocus forms					
Mediations or conferences					
Other (see manual)					
Total score	+	+		=	



<b>BEHAVIORAL RECOGNITIONS, REMINDERS, REDIRECTS</b>	Un-observed (0)	Infrequent (1)	Common (2)	N/A	Notes
Positive narration or reinforcement of expectations					
Reminding students of expectations					
Redirecting students towards expectations					
Other (see manual)					
Total score		+	+	=	

<b>SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SKILL BUILDING</b>	Un-observed (0)	Infrequent (1)	Common (2)	N/A	Notes
Visuals describing personal success factors, core values or behavior expectations					
Explicit instruction on expectations, values or success factors					
Integration of values, success factors, or expectations into lessons					
Other (see manual)					
Total score		+	+	=	

<b>STUDENT SUPPORTS</b>	Un-observed (0)	Infrequent (1)	Common (2)	N/A	Notes
Check-ins with students					
Team meetings to discuss behavioral data, student concerns, and available supports					
Small group interventions					
Other (see manual)					
Total score		+	+	=	

<b>AWARENESS OF RACIAL INEQUALITIES AND BIAS</b>	Un-observed (0)	Infrequent (1)	Common (2)	N/A	Notes
Visual displays of diversity/cultural awareness					
Diversity among staff					
Discussions of racial inequity/dynamics					
Other (see manual)					
Total score		+	+	=	

<b>PUNITIVE + EXCLUSIONARY PRACTICES</b>	Un-observed (2)	Infrequent (1)	Common (0)	N/A	Notes
Sending students out of the classroom					
In-school suspension or detention					
Security guard referral					
Other (see manual)					
Total score* (this category is reverse scored)		+	+	=	

<b>Observational Category</b>	<b>Score</b>
Relationship Building	
Restorative Practices	
Behavioral Recognitions, Reminders & Redirects	
Social Emotional Skill Building	
Student Supports	
Awareness of Racial Inequalities and Bias	
Punitive and Exclusionary Practices	