

Dear Worcester Community,

We write to you as the Board and administrative team of Turtle Island Children's Center (TICC), with deep appreciation for your thoughtful engagement in the discussions about a potential partnership between Doty School and Turtle Island. As fellow Vermonters and caregivers, we recognize the importance of maintaining vibrant, connected communities in our rural towns—and we see a powerful opportunity to work together in support of that goal.

For nearly 30 years, Turtle Island has provided high-quality early childhood education to Central Vermont families. Our philosophy is rooted in play, exploration, and relationship-based learning that supports the whole child. We believe that every child is inherently capable and that a nurturing, developmentally appropriate environment lays the groundwork for lifelong success. Our Pre-K program in particular has earned a strong reputation for excellence – one that blends the warmth and flexibility of a community-based program with a commitment to evidence-based learning and family partnership.

We see the potential for Doty School and Turtle Island to come together in a way that benefits the entire Worcester community. This partnership could create a more sustainable and innovative school structure, one that meets the needs of young children, working families, and educators.

Here's what Turtle Island can offer the Worcester community through a partnership at Doty:

- A full-day, play-inspired, nature-based early childhood program co-located at Doty—providing accessible care that supports working families and reflects rural values of outdoor exploration and community connection.
- A well-established, high-quality Pre-K program with skilled educators, strong family partnerships, and a developmentally grounded curriculum. Turtle Island would give Worcester families priority access to available Pre-K spots, helping increase participation in the 10-hour/week public Pre-K program.
- Enhanced services for children with special needs, ensuring they receive support in familiar, integrated environments.
- An investment in the success of Worcester's children: research shows that children who attend high-quality early childhood programs are more likely to graduate, go to college, be employed full-time, and enjoy better health as adults.
- Support with affordability: We work closely with families to access state childcare subsidies (CCFAP), which cover most or all tuition for qualifying families. (40% of current Turtle students qualify for financial assistance)

- Year-round education and care for children ages 6 weeks to 5 years, supporting families with consistent, high-quality early learning across all seasons.
- Turtle Island currently offers before- and after-care for enrolled students and could explore options for extending those hours to Doty students as well, helping meet the needs of working families.
- Economic benefits through increased foot traffic to local businesses, especially during drop-off and pick-up hours.
- Opportunities for children and families to build relationships across town lines, fostering a stronger sense of community within the Central Vermont region. Currently, 56% of Turtle children live in Montpelier, 27% live in WCUUSD towns, and 17% live elsewhere.
- A deep commitment to equity and social justice, woven into classroom practices, staff development, and community partnerships – helping children grow into compassionate, inclusive members of their communities.
- A vibrant early childhood education hub that directly addresses the regional shortage of care and helps attract and retain young families to the area.
- Strong collaboration between Turtle Island and Doty staff, creating a more aligned and supportive experience for children from 6 months through elementary school.
- A model for public-private partnership that could be replicated in other Vermont towns that wish to address a shortfall in childcare while maintaining their identity.

We know that change can be hard, especially when it feels sudden or imposed. That's why we want to affirm our commitment to transparency, collaboration, and honoring the unique culture of Doty School and the Worcester community. Our goal is not to replace or displace, but to partner thoughtfully and with care.

We also understand that any proposal must reflect the voices and values of both parties. Decisions about how much space to offer—and where—ultimately rest with WCUUSD leadership, who must consider what is best for their students and the district as a whole. Once we receive a proposal from the district, we will carefully evaluate whether the space and structure can support our children, teachers, and families. If the plan is viable, we are committed to working collaboratively with the town and school community we'd be joining to ensure the program is implemented in a way that respects local needs and offers meaningful benefits to the broader community.

Respectfully,
The Turtle Island Children's Center Board and Administration