

# Charlotte Country Day School

January 2026

## Lower School:

### Our Ongoing Work to Foster Well-Being, Belonging, and Healthy Learning

In the Lower School, our program is intentionally designed to nurture children’s curiosity, confidence, well-being, and sense of belonging. The themes Jennifer Wallace elevates—**connection, purpose, play, balance, and healthy striving**—have long served as the foundation of our work with young learners. We remain deeply committed to creating an environment where children feel seen, valued, and safe to take risks that support authentic growth.

The initiatives below highlight how our longstanding instructional, **SEL, DEIB, and wellness practices** come together to create a joyful, developmentally responsive learning experience for every child.

#### Embedded SEL and DEIB Instruction & Adult Expertise

- **Our SEL and DEIB strands are** interwoven across the entire Lower School experience, shaping how we design learning, build community, and support each child.
- These lenses help create an **inclusive environment** where students feel seen for their individuality and known deeply by their teachers.
- We intentionally teach **CASEL-aligned skills** (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) across grade levels through purposeful lessons and daily routines.
- In addition to serving as a lens for all instruction, our Lower School DEIB strands guide the ways we build community, design curriculum, and support student growth. These strands include **Empathy and Belonging; Healthy, Complex Identities; Respect Across Differences; Naming Bias, Prejudice, and Stereotypes; and Taking Action**. They help students understand themselves and others, develop inclusive mindsets, and contribute positively to their classroom and broader community.
- For six years, we have partnered with the **Institute for Social-Emotional Learning** to provide ongoing professional learning for faculty focused on student and adult wellness, relationship-based teaching, and strategies for supporting emotional regulation and resilience.

- Teachers explicitly model and **teach SEL strategies** such as recognizing and managing emotions, scaling problems, conflict-resolution strategies, flexible thinking, and perspective-taking. They provide both intentional proactive instruction and responsive, in-the-moment coaching of these skills as needed.
- As a **Responsive Classroom** school, we use structured routines like Morning Meeting and Closing Circle to build community, strengthen relationships, and teach skills such as cooperation, empathy, and respectful communication.

### **Knowing Students Deeply**

- Relationship-building is at the heart of our work. **Teachers know students well** (their learning profiles, motivators, frustrations, strengths, and areas of need) and use that knowledge to guide instructional decisions.
- We have **two full-time Lower School counselors** who partner closely with teachers and families to support students' social-emotional development, provide early intervention, and help children practice healthy coping strategies. Counselors offer direct lessons, small-group support, consultation with families, and responsive care when students need help navigating big feelings, friendships, or stress.
- We prioritize **strong partnerships with families** to ensure each child is supported academically, socially, and emotionally.
- Together, this **team-based approach** ensures each child is known, supported, and surrounded by adults who understand how to help them thrive.

### **Meeting Students Where They Are: Differentiation & Support**

- Providing the **right balance** of challenge and support is central to our philosophy.
- Our **Educational Resources Program (ERP)** includes tutoring, speech-language services, and occupational therapy, ensuring students receive targeted, developmentally appropriate support when needed.
- **Differentiation** is our shared professional learning emphasis this year, and teachers use small-group instruction, flexible grouping, targeted mini-lessons, and scaffolded tasks across all subject areas to meet every learner where they are.

### **Purposeful, Research-Informed Instruction**

- Our academic practices are **grounded in research** about how children learn best.
- Homework expectations are intentionally limited to **promote balance and family time**, with nightly reading as the primary expectation. Any additional homework is brief, purposeful, and designed to be completed with minimal frustration.

- Students are encouraged to use **homework as a communication tool** – leaving notes when something is challenging so teachers can adjust instruction and provide support.

### **Wellness, Play, and Healthy Habits**

- **Wellness is a core focus** in the Lower School. Our daily Physical Education program builds not only physical skills but also sportsmanship, personal goal setting, resilience, and respect for self and others.
- We intentionally **protect time for free and unstructured play**, recognizing it as essential to healthy child development. During these open-ended moments, students practice problem-solving, imagination, negotiation, teamwork, and self-regulation in ways that cannot be replicated through structured activities alone. **Unstructured play** provides balance in the school day, supports emotional well-being, and helps children build flexible thinking and social resilience.
- **Daily recess** supports free play, imagination, social problem-solving, and essential peer-to-peer learning (fundamental components of healthy development and balance).

### **Digital Citizenship**

- All students in JK–4 receive **age-appropriate digital citizenship instruction**, helping them build healthy habits around screen use, online communication, kindness, privacy, and problem-solving in digital spaces.

### **Family Partnership & Parent Education**

- We view **parents as essential partners** and provide ongoing parent education sessions focused on SEL, academics, DEIB, technology, sports, and supporting children’s well-being at home.
- These learning opportunities **reinforce shared understanding** and help families feel informed and empowered.

### **Service Learning & Purpose**

- Our Lower School culture **emphasizes helping others** and understanding one’s role in the community.
- Each grade level engages in **service-learning projects** which help children develop empathy, a sense of agency, and habits of giving that align with our mission and with Jennifer Wallace’s emphasis on meaningful contribution.

## **A Rich Curriculum that Builds Skills for Life**

- Our curriculum—across literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts, world languages, design lab and more—is **intentionally designed to help children** develop the habits of mind, character, and curiosity they will need as they grow into thoughtful, capable, and compassionate change-makers.
- We **nurture intrinsic motivation** by emphasizing deep understanding, creativity, collaboration, and joyful exploration.
- **Student leadership** opportunities through classroom jobs, buddies programs, or cross-grade connections.