



THE WHOLE
CHILD

The Whole Child Approach to Education

Ensuring each child, in each school, in each community is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

The demands of the 21st century require a new approach to education to fully prepare students for college, career, and citizenship. Research, practice, and common sense confirm that a whole child approach to education will develop and prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow by addressing students' comprehensive needs through the shared responsibility of students, families, schools, and communities.

All educators want to improve the work they do for students, their families, and the community. Whether its instruction, school climate, leadership, family engagement, or any of the other issues schools face on a daily basis, all educators need tools to help them improve their actions and methods. A whole child approach, which ensures that each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, sets the standard for comprehensive, sustainable school improvement and provides for long-term student success. These are the Whole Child Tenets.

Launched in 2007, ASCD's Whole Child Initiative is an effort to change the conversation about education from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long term development and success of children. Through the initiative, ASCD helps educators, families, community members, and policymakers move from a vision about educating the whole child to sustainable, collaborative action. ASCD is joined in this effort by Whole Child Partner organizations representing the education, arts, health, policy, and community sectors.

Whole Child Tenets

Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.

Research confirms that students do better in school when they are emotionally and physically healthy. They miss fewer classes, are less likely to engage in risky or antisocial behavior, concentrate more, and achieve higher test scores. Unfortunately, too many students go to class in less than optimal health. Schools and communities committed to educating the whole child create an environment that promotes the learning and practice of healthy lifestyles. This includes healthy menus at school, regular recess, physical and health education, school counseling, and intramural programs. Schools and communities collaborate to increase access to health care for children and their families.

Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.

Feeling safe at school translates into higher academic achievement, increased student well-being, and greater engagement. Children who don't feel safe can't concentrate on their studies, don't connect with their classmates, or don't go to school at all. Schools and communities committed to educating the whole child work together to ensure the physical, social, emotional, and academic safety and security of students and adults. They consistently assess comprehensive safety issues to foster effective conditions for learning.

Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.

To learn at their best, students must be engaged and motivated. Substantial research shows that students who feel both valued by adults and a part of their schools perform better academically and also have more positive social attitudes, values, and behavior. Plus, they are less likely to engage in drug use, violence, or sexual activity. After-school programs can promote academic achievement, but their success requires targeted investment, stakeholder commitments, focused academic support, quality programming, and a process of continual improvement. Schools and communities committed to educating the whole child engage students in the learning process and provide opportunities that connect them to the community. Students who are engaged and connected to their schools demonstrate increased academic achievement, attendance rates, and participation in activities.

Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults.

In addition to improving students' academic performance, research shows that supportive schools also help prevent a host of negative consequences, including isolation, violent behavior, dropping out of school, and suicide. Central to a supportive school are teachers, administrators, and other caring adults who take a personal interest in each student and in the success of each student. School and communities committed to educating the whole child connect students with caring adults throughout a student's school career through a variety of positive relationships. These relationships reinforce academic achievement and social, civic, ethical, and emotional development.

Each student is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.

To succeed in college, other postsecondary education, and the workplace, students need higher-level thinking, communications, and problem-solving skills as well as knowledge of the world and its people. These are all products of a curriculum that challenges students to work harder as they investigate a wide range of real-world subjects. What's more, our high school graduates who pursue college must be adequately prepared, yet too many are taking remedial courses, which raises deep concerns about the value of their high school diplomas. Students engage in a broad spectrum of activities in and out of the classroom. Districts and communities committed to educating the whole child work together to prepare young people for success in higher education, employment, and civic life by providing meaningful learning experiences and opportunities to demonstrate achievement.

Schools implementing a whole child approach use collaboration, coordination, and integration to ensure that the approach is sustainable within the community.

Schools using a whole child approach use collaboration, coordination, and integration to ensure the approach's long-term success. Policies and practices, from professional development to the school master schedule to community partnerships, must reflect the central effort to ensure each child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. True school improvement is hard. It's not about a single passionate leader. It's not about "fixing" teachers and teaching or parents and parenting. It's not about poverty. It's not about money. And it's not about high standards. It's about all of them, and more. Only a whole child approach aligned across curriculum and instruction, school climate and structures, professional development and student learning, can truly ensure that each child, in each school, in each community, is prepared for long-term success in further education, career, and civic life.