

EDUCATING THE WHOLE CHILD IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Introduction

As the United States Congress and Department of Education work on the important task of the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind, the demands of the 21st century require a whole child approach to education policy and practice. It is critical that the current overemphasis on standardized tests, punitive accountability systems, and rigid mandates be replaced by a more student-centered, educator supporting, instruction driven model focused on teaching and learning and meeting the needs of all students, both in and out of school (Struck, 2010).

In 2006, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) convened the Commission on the Whole Child- a group composed of leading thinkers, researchers, and practitioners. It was charged with redefining a successful learner from one whose achievement is measured solely by academic tests to one who is knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the global world beyond formal schooling. The commission issued a call to action for educators, parents, businesses, health and social services providers, arts professionals, recreation leader sand policymakers to forge a new compact with our children to ensure their whole and healthy development-a compact that strives to develop the Whole Child. A whole child is intellectually active, physically, verbally, socially, and academically competent;empathetic, kind, caring and fair; creative and curious; disciplined, self-directed, and goal-oriented; free; confident; cared for and valued. This is the comprehensive goal of a whole child education. The ASCD Whole Child Initiative is built upon five basic tenets: Healthy, Safe, Engaged, Supported, and Challenged (Struck, 2010).

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

- Each student learns in an intellectually challenging environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.
- Each child is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
- Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults.
- Each graduate is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment in a global environment.

Healthy

Students who are academically successful in school are emotionally and physically healthy. These students have higher attendance rates, are able to focus more, and participate significantly less often in at risk behaviors.

The percentage of overweight children 6-11 years old has more than doubled in the past two decades, and the percentage of overweight adolescents has more than tripled (Institute of Medicine on the National Academies, 2006).

Nearly 40% of elementary schools have eliminated or are considering eliminating recess, even though 75% of parents and teachers think elementary recess should be mandatory (PTA, 2008).

Today in the United States, 1 in 10 children and adolescents suffers from mental illness severe enough to result in significant functional impairment. Children and adolescents with mental disorders are at much greater risk for dropping out of school and suffering long-term impairments (National Advisory Mental Health Council Work Group on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Intervention Development and Deployment, 2001).

Safe

Feeling emotionally and physically safe at school is directly connected to higher academic achievement, increased student well being, and more student involvement. When students do not feel safe they have a hard time concentrating, are absent more often, and feel isolated from their peers.

Nearly 6% of high school students skip school at least once a month because they feel unsafe at school or en route (Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007).

About one-third of adolescent Internet users have been victims of cyber bullying and one-fifth have been cyber bullies themselves (Lenhart, 2007; Patchin % Hinduja, 2006).

Students engaged in school-based social and emotional learning attained higher grades and scored 11 percentile points higher on academic tests than their peers who did not engage in such learning (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2008).

The research citations in this section are used, with permission, from the ASCD publication, *Making the Case for Educating the Whole Child*.

Engaged

Students must be engaged and motivated to maximize their full learning potential. There is substantial research that indicates students who achieve academically have teachers who use active learning strategies such as project-based inquiry-based learning, participate in a wide range of extra curricular activities, and participate in meaningful service learning and community based internships. Students who dread coming to school because they find it boring or purposeless do not see the link between school and real world college and career goals.

Only 55% of high school students feel they are an important part of their school community. Two-thirds of students report that they are bored in class very day or in every class (Yazzie-Montz, 2007).

At least one in four high school students drops out before earning a diploma (Dinkes, et al., 2006). Boredom is a leading reason that students leave school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Burke, 2006).

High school drop outs are more than three times more likely than high school graduate to be arrested and more than eight times as likely to be incarcerated (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2008).

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Supported

Research shows that caring and competent teachers can make a huge difference in students' academic performance and learning attitudes. All students need to feel supported and valued by caring and qualified adults who have a solid grasp on their developmental process.

More than one in five students say there is no adult who cares about them and knows them well (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).

Lower student-to-counselor ratios decrease both the recurrence of student disciplinary problems and the numbers of students involved in a disciplinary incident (Carrell& Carrell, 2006).

Learning environments that focus on caring student-teacher relationships, students' social and emotional needs, and high expectations result in students who perform better academically: are more likely to attend school; and have significantly lower rates of emotional distress, violence, delinquency, substance abuse, and sexual activity (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2008).

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Challenged

Regardless of students' ethnicity, socio economic status, and personal circumstances they all need to be challenged. A 21st century curriculum must stretch students to higher levels of thinking, communication, and problem solving skills that focus on real world situations. As the United States continues to fall further behind other countries in education it can no longer stay glued to the traditional formats and policies that no longer fit with what our students need to succeed.

Of all students at public four-year colleges and universities, 29% have enrolled in a remedial class. A 2008 survey of remedial students shows nearly four out of five had a high school grade point average of 3.0 or higher (Strong American Schools, 2008).

Of college students, 59% reported that their high school classes were easy, and nearly half would have preferred that those classes had been harder to better prepare them for college (Strong American Schools, 2008).

More than one third of states have already adopted college and career-ready standards and graduation requirements, but far fewer states have developed ways to test whether students are college and career-ready (Achieve, 2008).

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A Blueprint for Reform, US Department of Education

In March 2010, the US Department of Education provided its publication, *A Blueprint for Reform, the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act*, to the US Congress and the public domain. In the introduction, President Obama calls for a world-class education for every child. He views a world-class education for all students as a moral imperative- the key to securing a more equal, fair, and just society. He promotes a whole child approach by stating we must support families, communities, and schools working in partnership to deliver services and supports that address the full range of student needs. He also strongly speaks to the most important factor to students' success in school—their teachers (US Department of Education, 2010). All students need and deserve to have caring and competent teachers consistently from preschool to high school graduation.

In the *Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students* section, there is a definite parallel to the ASCD Whole Child initiative. It cites the importance of supporting innovative models that create learning environments that help all students be safe, healthy, and supported in their classrooms, schools, and communities. It also stresses the need for strategies to better engage families and community members in their children's education (US Department of Education, 2010).

It also encourages schools to develop and implement an accountable school climate assessment to evaluate school engagement, school safety (addressing drug, alcohol, and violence issues), and school environment and to publicly report this data (US Department of Education, 2010).

US Senate Hearing: Meeting the Needs of the Whole Student

On April 22, 2010 the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (HELP) held a hearing titled, *ESEA Reauthorization: Meeting the Needs of the Whole Student*. Senator Tom Harkin, Iowa, the HELP Chairman and Ranking Member, facilitated the hearing. Throughout the course of his substantial career in the House and the Senate, Senator Harkin has been a staunch and steadfast champion on issues affecting children-everything from the foods they eat to the quality of education they receive and the school buildings in which they learn. The purpose of the hearing was to discuss in a roundtable format ways that federal policy can support efforts to address the needs of the whole student, since students who are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged are more likely to succeed in school. The roundtable included ten invited witnesses who spoke of ways to support students not only academically but also socially and emotionally, the value of parent and community engagement and ways

to enrich the learning environment for all students. The witnesses were: Geoffrey Canada, Harlem Children's Zone; Karen Pittman, Forum for Youth Investment; Eric Schwartz, Citizens Schools; George Sugai, Positive Behavior Instructional Supports (PBIS); Jamie Green, Rhode Island Library Association, Rhode Island; Nikki Rittling, PE Instructor; Lynsey Wood Jeffries, Higher Achievement; Anne Henderson, Anneberg Institute for Parent/Community Involvement; Dan Cardinali, Communities in Schools; and Clare Struck, Malcolm Price Laboratory School.

Following are excerpts from the author's oral and written testimonies.

Over the course of the last year, whole child advocates across the country have been working to spread the word about the need to provide each child with a whole child education. Several states have petitioned their state boards of education and state legislatures to adopt a resolution acknowledging the need to educate the whole child (Struck, 2010).

Each student deserves access to personalized learning and support from qualified and caring adults. Research shows that, in addition, to improving students' academic performance, supportive schools also help prevent a host of negative consequences, including isolation, violent behavior, dropping out, 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 (Struck, 2010).

To promote school settings that are physically and emotionally safe for every student and adult, ASCD proposes that Congress develop a set of more comprehensive indicators of student well-being in ESEA. These would include disaggregated statistics about student security, discipline, and support to help inform teacher professional development activities and integrate climate and culture strategies into school improvement plans at the school and district level (Struck, 2010).

A video of the hearing and all of the witness's testimonies can be found at www.wholechild@ascd.org.

The Whole Child: Vision in Action

In March 2010, Malcolm Price Laboratory School (MPLS) was awarded the first-ever Vision in Action: the Whole Child Award by ASCD at the ASCD National Conference in San Antonio, Texas. This award was established to recognize schools that move beyond the narrow focus of academic achievement to educate the whole child through intentional and

coordinated planning. MPLS has a longstanding tradition of focusing on the whole child. It constantly strives to develop and maintain a cohesive community of learners who value and respect each other. At MPLS, community is not so much a place as an experience—the experience of feeling valued, connected, and responsible for yourself and others. When accepting the award, Bridgette Wagoner, MPLS Director said, “We are honored, humbled, and thrilled to be named ASCD’s first Vision in Action award winner. Price Lab’s success can be attributed to our relentless focus on providing students with a challenging and relevant curriculum in a safe and trusting environment that feels like a family.”

Here are some examples of the Whole Child tenets in action at MPLS:

- **Healthy:** MPLS has daily physical education programs for PK-10 that emphasize wellness and healthy living. This leads into a Healthy Active Lifestyles course for grades 11-12 where students manage their time and take responsibility for their own health and fitness choices. The MPLS Grassroots Café is the current meal program that transformed from highly processed and high caloric menus to one that offers fresh and organic food, some coming from the garden where MPLS students have planted and harvested vegetables under the leadership of a volunteer master gardener (Cole, Cryer, Henriksen, McCumber, Struck & Wagoner, 2010).
- **Safe:** MPLS has a well-established comprehensive and developmental school counseling program based upon the American School Counseling Association Model that addresses the academic, career, and personal/social development of every PK-12 student. There is a school wide emphasis on character education that is integrated throughout the PK-12 curriculum (Cole, Cryer, Henriksen, McCumber, Struck & Wagoner, 2010).
- **Engaged:** All K-12 MPLS students participate in January and May Term project based learning experiences. Examples included: high school students hosting a talk radio show, middle school students created film vignettes that encourage viewers to act on relevant issues such as gossip and cyber bullying, and elementary students planning and having a garage sale and donating their earnings to the Red Cross for earthquake relief in Haiti. Project based learning helps MPLS students develop 21st Century Skills such as demonstrating initiative and self direction, using individual talents and skills for productive outcomes, effectively managing time, and performing work without oversight (Cole, Cryer, Henriksen, McCumber, Struck & Wagoner, 2010).

Supported: All PK-5 students and teachers participate in the Elementary Citizenship Program that promotes the MPLS Guidelines for Success: Respect, Learning, Responsibility, Attitude, and Honesty. All 6-12 students participate in cooperative advisory groups that meet daily at the middle school level and at least twice a month at the high school level. Many teachers and staff support the MPLS students by taking leadership roles and attending the various extra curricular activities (Cole, Cryer, Henriksen, McCumber, Struck & Wagoner, 2010).

Challenged: MPLS is grounded in a student-centered curriculum where students are engaged in interactive, hands on, and inquiry based learning. Diverse learning abilities and styles are respected at MPLS. Faculty are well seasoned in developing and delivering differentiated learning. All high school students participate in a college preparatory curriculum including multiple pathways to graduation and flexible scheduling options to allow juniors and seniors to personalize their educational experience (Cole, Cryer, Henriksen, McCumber, Struck & Wagoner, 2010).

MPLS is featured on the March, 2010 ASCD Whole Child International Podcast (<http://www.blogwholechildeducation.org.podcast>).

Conclusion

Children who are hurting, hungry, scared, and disengaged cannot learn to their full potential. Schools should not focus on academic achievement alone. Now more than ever, in this ever-changing global society of the 21st century, schools must invest in a whole child approach to education for ALL students. ALL students deserve to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged in their learning environments.

After the April 22, 2010 Senate Hearing on Education the Whole Child, Dr. Gene Carter, ASCD Executive Director, made this statement, “Struck’s testimony highlighted the need for a policy infrastructure that helps to nurture the whole child approach already occurring in some schools and to jump start efforts in other schools or districts struggling to meet students’ needs. The clear message from all of the panelists was that now more than ever, we must provide students with a comprehensive education that imparts the knowledge, skills, and proficiencies necessary to succeed after graduation, and that this effort involves much more than a simplistic focus on state administered reading and math tests. It requires a whole child approach to education,” (Carter, 2010).

The hearing certainly indicated that national policy makers recognize the need for and appreciate the value of a whole child approach to education. Yet, steadfast and sustained efforts from educators across Iowa and the entire nation are needed to continue to raise awareness and understanding among educators, families, policymakers, and local community members about educating the whole child. We must be willing to invest in the long haul of advocacy and capacity building to ensure that educating the whole child is included in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

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