

MAKING THE CASE FOR  
**EDUCATING THE  
WHOLE CHILD**



 THE WHOLE  
CHILD

# The 21st Century Imperative

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We live in a global economy that requires our students to be prepared to think both critically and creatively, evaluate massive amounts of information, solve complex problems, and communicate well. A strong foundation in reading, writing, math, and other core subjects is still as important as ever, yet by itself is insufficient for lifelong success.

For too long, we have committed to time structures, coursework, instructional methods, and assessments designed more than a century ago. Our current definition of student success is too narrow. It is time to put students first, align resources to students' multiple needs, and advocate for a more balanced approach.

What works best for children? What must we all—educators, families, policymakers, and community members—do to ensure their success? Answering those questions pushes us to redefine what a successful learner is and how we measure success. A child who enters school healthy and feels safe is ready to learn. A student who feels connected to school is more likely to stay in school. All students who have access to challenging and engaging academic programs are better prepared for further education, work, and civic life. These components must work together, not in isolation. That is the goal of whole child education.

The demands of the 21st century require a new approach to education policy and practice—a whole child approach to learning, teaching, and community engagement. Measuring academic achievement is important and necessary; no one is arguing otherwise. But if we fail to move beyond a narrow curriculum and accountability system, we will have failed to adequately prepare children for their futures.

ASCD—in partnership with state and local leaders—is helping schools, districts, and communities across the country move from a vision for educating the whole child to action. States and school districts are adopting policies and practices to better educate the whole child, but we can do more. This publication makes the case for why we need to educate the whole child and provides clear examples of how it's taking place.

To find out more and to help educate the whole child, visit [www.wholechildeducation.org](http://www.wholechildeducation.org).

# ASCD's Whole Child Tenets

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



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



[www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)

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



# Students Must Be **HEALTHY**

**R**esearch 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.

## What the Data Tell Us

- Regular physical activity can improve the health and quality of life of people of all ages (HealthyPeople.gov, n.d.); however, only 17 percent of high school students currently meet the recommended daily amount (Eaton et al., 2010).

- Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in the United States have tripled. Today nearly one third of U.S. children are overweight (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008), and almost 17 percent of children and adolescents are obese (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2012).

- Research shows that one of five children and adolescents experiences symptoms of a mental health illness (Eaton et al., 2010), and as many as 80 percent may go untreated (Breslau, 2010). Children and adolescents with mental disorders are at much greater risk for dropping out of school and suffering long-term impairments (Breslau, 2010).

- Research shows that programs offering breakfast at no cost to all children, regardless of income, during the first part of the school day dramatically increase student participation in school breakfast (Food Research and Action Center, 2009). However, only 9.7 million of the 20 million low-income students who are eligible for a school breakfast receive it (Share our Strength, 2012).

- Improved health can also improve attendance at school. Higher rates of absenteeism have been reported for those students who are overweight; suffer from asthma; or have poor health status, diet, or lack of sleep. Studies have also shown that health-related absenteeism can be reversed by increasing access to services and increasing physical activity. (Basch, 2010)



## Health and Wellness Are Key to School Success

Hilton Head Island Elementary (HHIE), an International Baccalaureate World School located in South Carolina, was awarded the South Carolina ASCD Whole Child Award for its efforts in promoting wellness and healthy choices in students and staff.

The school's Healthy Choices–Eat Smart/Move More program has changed the cafeteria menu to include more appetizing and healthy food choices for the school community. The school food service company is helping the school in these efforts by offering more student-choice entrees, vegetarian trays, and healthy snacks and using more appetizing preparations for the diverse student population.

Additionally, the faculty at HHIE are working with experts to develop curriculum in gardening and nutritional awareness. The health and well-being behaviors HHIE students are learning now prepare them well to take charge of their own health and well-being in the future.

## Community Collaborations Promote Healthy Lifestyles Among Students

Batesville Community School Corporation, a school district in Batesville, Ind., promotes a strong emphasis on health and boosts this with collaborations in its local community. Batesville, an ASCD Healthy School Communities mentor site, has established multiple links between the school district and local community.

Through the local hospital and the local Food and Growers Association, the school has been able to improve cafeteria food offerings and expose students to more fruits and vegetables. This is complimented by ventures with local organizations to increase physical activity and improve health across the community, including the Presidential Challenge for Families, Indiana Mini-Marathon Team Batesville, Active For Life, and the development of a School Garden.

These efforts to improve physical activity and nutrition and provide safe places for students to socialize have resulted in healthier students and a safe, connected community.



## Students Must Be **SAFE**

**F**eeling safe at school translates into higher academic achievement, increased student well-being, and greater engagement, according to numerous studies. 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.

### What the Data Tell Us

- Students engaged in school-based social and emotional learning attained higher grades and scored 11 percentile points higher on academic achievement tests than peers who did not engage in such learning (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2008).
- Victims of crime or violence at school are likely to experience loneliness, depression, and adjustment difficulties, and they are more prone to truancy, poor academic performance, dropping out of school, and violent behaviors (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2010).
- Twenty percent of youth report being bullied on school grounds in the past 12 months (Eaton et al., 2012), and nearly 6 percent of students skipped school at least once in the past 30 days because of concerns for their own safety (Eaton et al., 2012).
- Eight out of 10 lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender students report being verbally harassed, and more than one-third were physically harassed in the past 12 months (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012).



## School Creates Safe, Supportive “Family”

Named a 2011 National School of Character by whole child partner the Character Education Partnership, Roosevelt Primary School in Ferndale, Mich., is committed to providing a successful, appropriate foundation to educate all children. The school has created a caring community—or, as staff and parents would say, a family.

Principal Dina Rocheleau says, “My staff is so committed to making this work, and they have such a connection with each other. Even when they have a conflict with one another, they know how to resolve it.”

Under the guidance of this principal, staff created classroom climates that teach children essential values. They moved to a relation-based approach that focuses on love, safety, and the whole child.

## New Jersey’s Safe and Civil Schools Initiative

State education leaders in New Jersey are committed to making sure students entering public school feel safe, engaged, and connected. They want students to see school as a place where they can learn and contribute to the world around them. To accomplish this, students receive coordinated and continuous support to strengthen their social and emotional skills and enhance positive character traits. The intent is to reduce substance abuse and bullying, develop positive learning environments, and improve students’ academic performance.

Preliminary results highlight that the initiative has a significant effect on reducing suspensions and violence and has shown to be effective in developing a positive climate, even in difficult school contexts (M. J. Elias, personal communication, 2012).



# Students Must Be **ENGAGED**

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.

## What the Data Tell Us

- 66 percent of surveyed students reported being bored in every class or at least every day in school. Of these students, 98 percent

claimed that the material being taught was the main reason for their boredom; 81 percent thought their subject material was uninteresting, while two out of three students found that the material lacked relevance. (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010)

- In 2009, only 75 percent of U.S. public high school diploma recipients graduated on time, indicating that one quarter of public high school students either did not graduate on time, received alternative completion certification, or dropped out (Stillwell, 2010; America's Promise, 2012).

- As students age, their level of school engagement tends to decrease—from a peak in elementary school through a significant dip in middle and early high school to a slight increase in later high school (Lopez, 2010).







## Case In Point ...

### It Takes a Village

One of the key factors that strengthens student, staff, and family engagement at Westside Village Magnet School, in Bend, Ore., is relationships. At Westside Village, all stakeholders are endowed with a sense of belonging and find space to collaborate to support an inclusive and democratic learning environment that meets the individual needs of each child.

With a well-rounded, hands-on curriculum that is integrated with the arts, health and wellness, civics, and outdoor “adventure learning,” students have not only achieved high test scores, but they have also learned to be advocates for their own learning needs.

Each year West Village students’ passions and personal learning goals—whether they are environmental, social, or local issues—are integrated directly into the curriculum.

### Engaged Learning Community Creates Safe, Supportive, Challenging Environment for Students

Ashton Elementary School, located in Cumberland, R.I., was the winner of the Rhode Island ASCD Whole Child Award for developing engaging and meaningful learning opportunities for its K–5 students, parents, and teachers.

The school uses data-benchmarking systems to regularly monitor student achievement and provide differentiated instruction to support learning for all to provide the most engaging learning environment for each student. In addition the school provides a Child Enrichment Program, which offers after-school activities—including karate, drama, art, yoga, global celebrations, basketball, scrapbooking, mad science, chorus, cartooning, and a cooking club—to engage students’ interests and talents.

Students who need extra support are referred to a Target Team that offers additional “check-in, check-out” services, social skills training, and in-school counseling or wrap-around services for the family. Close links back into the local community provide cohesion and a supportive setting for the school and its students.



# Students Must Be **SUPPORTED**

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.

## What the Data Tell Us

- 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).

- When asked to identify words or phrases that best described the teacher who had the most positive influence in their life, people in the United States responded with the word *caring*, followed by *encouraging*, *interesting*, *personable*, and *of high-quality* (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010).

- A student-counselor ratio of 250 to 1 is recommended by the American School Counselor Association, though the nationwide average is 471 to 1 (American School Counselor Association, 2012).

- Of students who have considered dropping out, 16 percent identified “No adults in the school cared about me” as a reason for thinking about dropping out, and 9 percent of the respondents stated that “Adults in the school encouraged me to drop out” (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010).



## Learning by Doing, Part of a Real-World Curriculum

A personalized and nurturing learning experience for all students is the foundational goal at Quest Early College High School, in Humble, Tex., winner of the 2011 Vision in Action: The ASCD Whole Child Award.

Through community partnerships and collaborations, students learn by doing by taking part in service learning, internships, and social actions that allow them to understand the relevance of what they learn. Students take ownership of their own learning by designing their own physical fitness goals and activities, beginning college coursework while in high school that can earn them up to 60 college credits, and designing their own senior capstone research projects that reflect a social issue that has personal meaning.

## States and Districts Embrace Social and Emotional Learning

Illinois was the first state to adopt learning standards in social and emotional learning. Social and emotional learning helps children develop awareness of their emotions and better manage them, set and achieve personal and academic goals, use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to maintain positive

relationships, and demonstrate decision making and responsible behaviors for success in school and life. Research indicates that this improves students' social and emotional development, readiness to learn, classroom behavior, and academic performance.

New York and California have policies for social and emotional learning, and large school districts like Anchorage, Alaska; Austin, Tex.; Chicago, Ill.; Cleveland, Ohio; Nashville, Tenn.; Oakland, Calif.; Sacramento, Calif.; and Washoe County, Nev., are implementing social and emotional learning strategies districtwide.



## Students Must Be **CHALLENGED**

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.

### What the Data Tell Us

- Of all students at public four-year colleges and universities, 29 percent have enrolled in a remedial class. A 2008 survey of remedial students shows that nearly four out of five had high school grade point averages of 3.0 or higher. (Strong American Schools, 2008)
- Of high school students who have considered dropping out, 13 percent indicate that their reason for

doing so was because the work was too easy. Nearly 50 percent of high school students indicate that they are not challenged in most of their classes. (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010)

- The growing consensus for raising expectations spurred the state-led Common Core State Standards Initiative, through which 44 states and the District of Columbia adopted K–12 college- and career-ready, internationally benchmarked standards. Nearly every other state is considering adopting the standards this year or has developed, in consultation with its postsecondary and employer community, its own college- and career-ready standards (Achieve, 2011).
- More than 80 percent of Americans believe that high school graduates should be college- and career-ready, but less than 50 percent believe they actually are (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010). In fact, a full 23 percent of high school graduates who take the Armed Forces Qualification Test fail to achieve a qualifying score (Theokas, 2010).



## Schools of Promise: Meeting 21st Century Challenges

In Seattle, Wash., the school district turned one of its biggest challenges into one of its greatest assets: a school reflecting the many languages spoken by students in its community. The John Stanford International School, named for the superintendent who led the school's vision, focuses on language and culture to prepare students for success. Learning a second language and gaining a global perspective are the school's hallmarks. The staff is committed to helping students achieve academic excellence in reading, writing, math, and other core subjects, including the arts, health, and fitness. The results are impressive: Stanford students outperform their peers in reading, writing, math, and science, according to results on 2008–09 statewide assessments.



## Underserved Students Realize Dreams of College

Bronx Preparatory Charter School in New York prepares underserved middle and high school students for higher education, civic involvement, and lifelong success by holding high expectations and providing a caring, structured environment.

College is integrated into every aspect at Bronx Prep, with rooms named after colleges and universities and teachers constantly referring to students' future higher education. Consistent science, social studies, physical education, and artistic block scheduling provide a well-rounded education. Middle and high school students spend one hour a day, four days a week participating in classes such as piano, violin, dance, and drama. To graduate from Bronx Prep, students must receive acceptance to college. One hundred percent of the school's first three high school graduating classes were admitted to four-year colleges.

The school's 700 students in grades 5–12 spend 50 percent more time in school than their peers in traditional public schools. Middle school students are introduced to high school-level content in 8th grade, and during the 11th and 12th grades, students can take college-level courses.

## ASCD Whole Child

# Policy Recommendations

ASCD's Whole Child Initiative is an association-wide effort to change the conversation about education from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that encompasses a broader definition of accountability. From its inception, the Whole Child Initiative has pursued three goals:

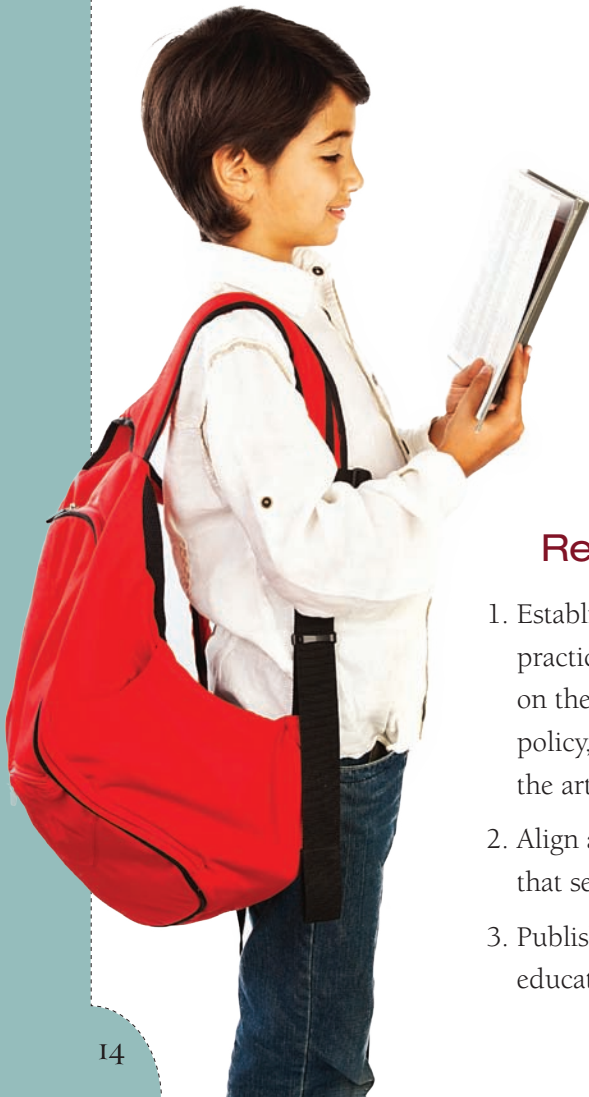
- Increase awareness and understanding among educators, families, policymakers, and local community members about a whole child approach to learning.
- Promote engagement between and among our members, our partners, and whole child supporters.
- Advocate action at local, state, and national levels that advances a whole child approach to learning.

The following recommendations comprise the policy agenda for the Whole Child Initiative. They focus on state-level institutions and policies because states hold the authority and leverage to effect significant change. Many states have made tremendous strides toward implementing these recommendations; we hope that others will follow.

These recommendations recognize both the need for enhanced core academic standards and a different infrastructure supporting the education system. The institutions and agencies that affect young people and their families must find ways to better coordinate their resources and services.

### Recommendations

1. Establish a statewide commission in each state to ensure policies and practices that support the whole child. These blue ribbon commissions on the whole child would be comprised of key leaders from business, policy, education, social services, health and recreation, public safety, and the arts.
2. Align and coordinate services, resources, and data across state agencies that serve children.
3. Publish an annual state report card that measures the health, safety, and education of children and families.



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# Take Action for Whole Child Education

ASCD calls on educators, policymakers, business leaders, families, and community members to work together on a whole child approach to education.

Support policies and practices that ensure

- Each student enters school **healthy** and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
- Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally **safe** for students and adults.
- Each student 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 student is **challenged** academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.

Visit the Whole Child Initiative website at [www.wholechilddeduction.org](http://www.wholechilddeduction.org) to

- Find examples of a whole child approach from around the world on our interactive Whole Child Examples Map.
- Assess your current practices using the ASCD School Improvement Tool.
- Discover evidence-based strategies that support the whole child in the areas of school climate and culture, curriculum and instruction, assessment, leadership, and family and community engagement.

Stay updated with social media! Like the Whole Child Initiative on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/wholechild](http://www.facebook.com/wholechild), and follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/wholechildadv](http://www.twitter.com/wholechildadv).

## About ASCD

ASCD is the global leader in developing and delivering innovative programs, products, and services that empower educators to support the success of each learner.



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