

MAKING THE CASE FOR

# EDUCATING 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 intellectually challenging 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 graduate is **challenged** academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment 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.

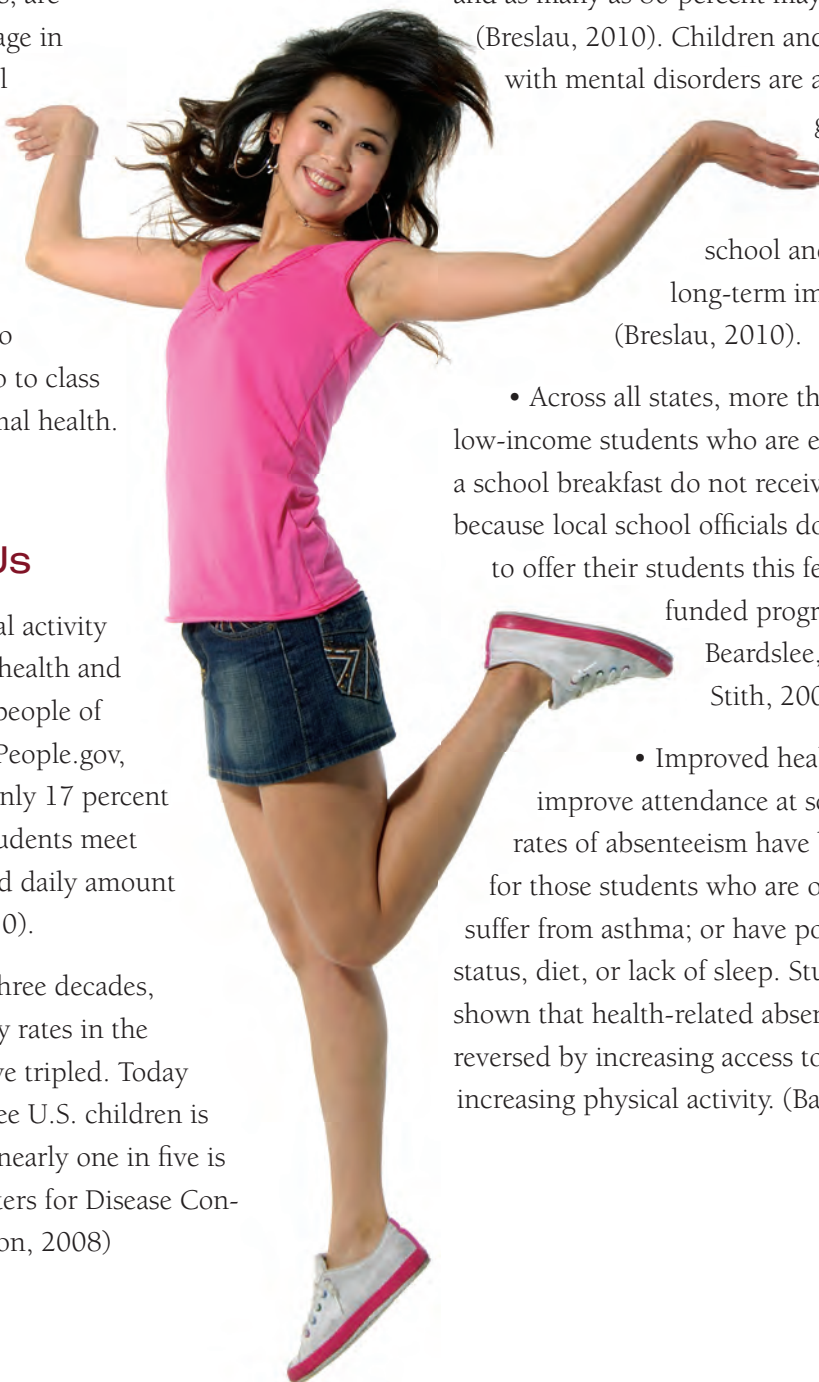
## What the Data Tell Us

- 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 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 in three U.S. children is overweight, and nearly one in five is obese. (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008)

- 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).

- Across all states, more than 10 million low-income students who are eligible for a school breakfast do not receive it, often because local school officials do not elect to offer their students this federally funded program (Brown, Beardslee, & Prothrow-Stith, 2008).

- 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)





## Case In Point ...

### District Emphasizes Lifetime Wellness Through Comprehensive Effort

The Millcreek Township School District near Erie, Pennsylvania, implemented a wellness program emphasizing healthy decision making and a physically active lifestyle. The district established school-based fitness centers; added an Action Based Learning Lab to integrate motor development and learning; increased the use of technology for

fitness monitoring and health curriculum delivery; and provided staff development in research-based, integrated physical education curriculum.

As part of the effort, student and staff wellness coordinators in each school plan, implement, and evaluate quality programs that address fitness, nutrition, stress management, and smoking cessation. For its efforts, the district's McDowell High School earned STARS status from the National Association for Sport & Physical Education for being one of the most outstanding physical education programs in the country.

### New Mexico Launches Healthy School Report Card

New Mexico Public Education Department supports the premise that healthy schools are high-achieving schools. The department's 2011–15 strategic plan promotes the use of the Healthy School Report Card, developed by ASCD, to help provide access to safe, healthy, and engaging environments so that students are ready to learn.

Adopted by the state in 2008, the Healthy School Report Card measures each school's efforts to promote physical activity, provide nutritious foods, and encourage family involvement in the health and education of their children. Originally adopted as a response to high levels of obesity in the state, where approximately a quarter of students are considered overweight or obese, the tool is now an integral part of the process that prepares students for lifelong success.

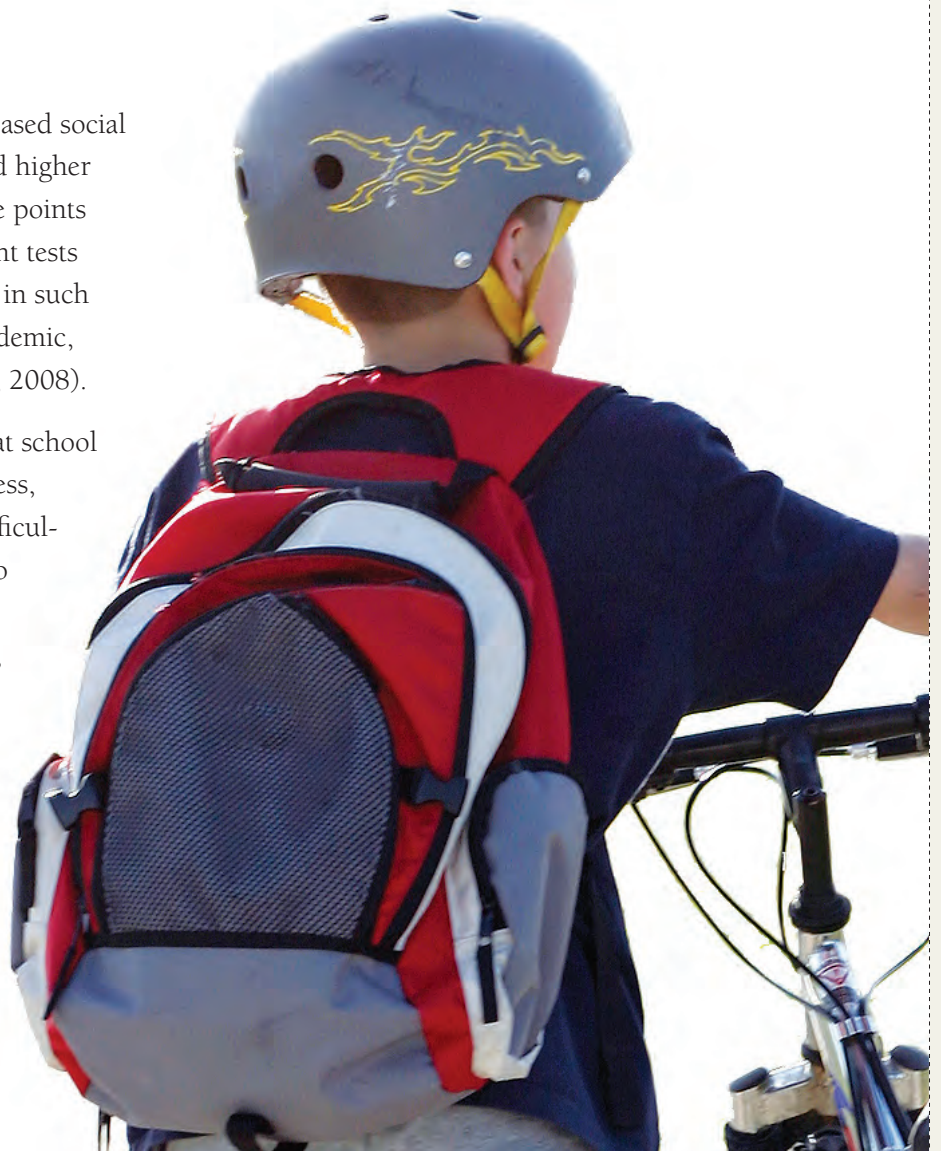


## Students Must Be **SAFE**

**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

- 74 percent of people in the United States say that bullying and harassment are serious problems in their local schools (*Nearly three*, n.d.).
- 5 percent of high school students skip school at least once in a given month because they feel unsafe at school or en route (Eaton et al., 2010).
- 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).





## Case In Point ...

### **Bullying Prevention: How One Rural School in Colorado Got Results**

In Brush, Colorado, the rate of bullying among Brush Middle School's 8th graders was among the highest in the state for middle schools. These rates dropped by a dramatic 56 percent after the school adopted the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. The internationally recognized program trains not only students but also teachers, staff, and parents to take a stand against bullying. The staff also listens closely to what students need. The school has followed through on recommendations for more hands-on bullying prevention activities; more adult supervision during free time; and a method to report bullying anonymously to

the school bullying prevention coordinator, including giving higher-risk students the coordinator's cell phone number.

### **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.



# 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.

- In 2008, 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).
- 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).

## 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)





## Case In Point ...

### T. C. Howe Reengages Its Community

Thomas Carr Howe Community High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, is a transformed school. In 2006 the school purposefully sought to reengage the students and the local community, moving toward a community school model that increased the hours the school remained open and the number of activities and services available to all members of the community. The school now has more than 40 community partnerships, and staff has seen a decline in behavior issues and discipline referrals. In addition, dropout rates have decreased, and academic scores are on the rise.

### Student Voice and Project-Based Learning in Iowa

Malcolm Price Laboratory School in Iowa, the winner of the 2010 Vision in Action: The ASCD Whole Child Award, has a long-standing tradition of focusing on the whole child. Price Lab believes that its community is not so much a place as an experience of feeling valued, connected, and responsible.

Among other efforts, the K–12 school actively seeks to engage students through programs that

support project-based learning. Students in elementary, middle, and high school devise or choose projects of personal interest—such as hosting a radio show, investigating string theory, producing a film, or developing a game—and see them through from conception to completion.

This student-centered approach has been fundamental in developing 21st century skills, such as demonstrating initiative and self-direction and using individual talents for productive outcomes. It has also allowed students to have a greater voice and developed a greater sense of ownership in the school and its activities among 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 460 to 1 (Johnson & Rochkind, 2010).
- 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).



## Case In Point ...

### Virginia Elementary School Structures for Success

Wenonah Elementary School in Waynesboro, Virginia, structures its student and adult interactions to help ensure success. The school uses tiered Response to Intervention strategies, shared professional planning time, and a 30-minute daily enrichment or intervention period for all students to help ensure that each student is successful.

To support strong instruction, grade-level teams meet weekly with an instructional coach and monthly with the principal to discuss student needs, instructional strategies and assessments, and professional development needs. School-based specialists, community partners, and volunteers do their part too, providing one-to-one academic, behavioral, and emotional support to students and their families.

### States and Districts Embrace Social and Emotional Learning

In 2004 Illinois became 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, Texas; and Cleveland, Ohio, 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)
- More than three-fourths of states have adopted college- and career-ready standards, but only 20 states require students

to complete a college- and career-ready curriculum to earn a high school diploma (Achieve, 2010).

- 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).





## Case In Point ...

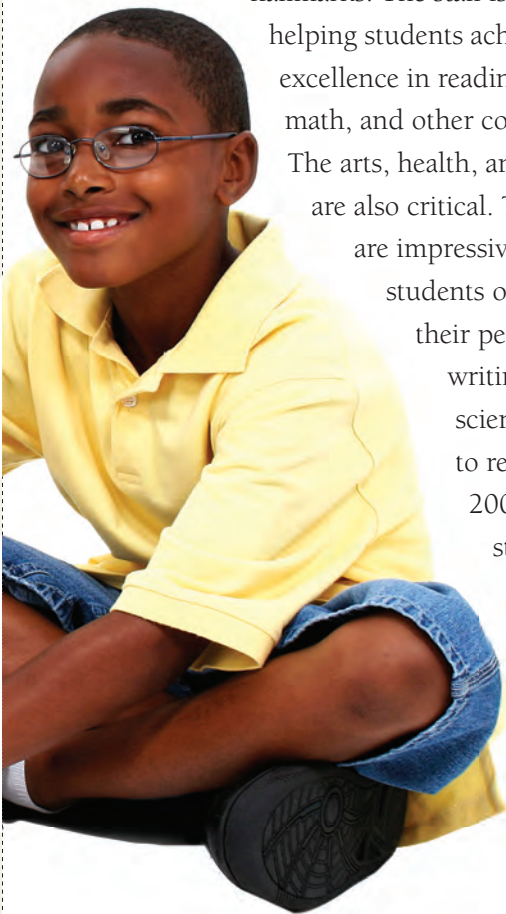
### Schools of Promise: Meeting 21st Century Challenges

In Seattle, Washington, 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. The arts, health, and fitness are also critical. 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. The school's 700 students in grades 5–12 spend 50 percent more time in school than their peers in traditional public schools. Heavy emphasis is placed on math and literacy. Middle school students attend up to two hours each in math and English daily and are introduced to high school-level content in 8th grade. During the 11th and 12th grades, students can take college-level courses.

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.



## 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 intellectually challenging 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 graduate is **challenged** academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment in a global environment.

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

- Grade your school and community and learn about strategies that support the whole child.
- Search by topic for in-depth resources from ASCD and our partners.
- Explore tools to help you engage your school and community in a whole child approach to education.
- Research examples of a whole child approach to education from across the world.
- Subscribe to the whole child e-newsletter, blog, and podcast for updates on whole child news and resources.

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 an educational leadership association advancing best practices and policies for the success of each learner.



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