

Touch of the Whole Child



Introduction

The concept of the "whole child" emphasizes the comprehensive development and well-being of children, recognizing that they are not just learners but multifaceted individuals with diverse needs and capabilities. It represents a holistic approach to education and child development, taking into account their cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and moral dimensions.

When we talk about the "whole child," we acknowledge that children's education should go beyond academic achievements and encompass their overall growth and potential. It encompasses the belief that children's learning and development are influenced by various interconnected factors, including their physical health, emotional well-being, social interactions, and cultural contexts.

The idea of nurturing the whole child acknowledges that children's learning experiences should address their individual strengths, interests, and challenges. It promotes a balanced approach that recognizes the importance of intellectual development, but also fosters creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, social skills, emotional intelligence, and physical well-being.

Educators and caregivers who prioritize the whole child approach understand that children's needs extend beyond the classroom. They create learning environments that are safe, inclusive, and supportive, catering to children's diverse learning styles and backgrounds. They recognize that children's mental and physical health significantly impact their ability to learn and succeed.

The whole child approach also emphasizes the importance of fostering positive relationships and connections within the learning community. It involves engaging families, promoting collaboration among educators, and forging partnerships with the broader community to create a nurturing and enriching environment for children.



Introduction

By embracing the whole child perspective, we strive to provide a well-rounded education that prepares children not only for academic success but also for a fulfilling and meaningful life. It recognizes that children are unique individuals with diverse talents, interests, and aspirations, and it seeks to empower them to reach their full potential in all aspects of their development.



Tenets of the Whole Child

Historically, most research and training regarding education has focused on the academic achievement of students. This focus became especially narrowed due to the emphasis on standardized testing and achievement in American schools over the last few decades.



However, recent years and global disruptions such as the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) have shown that a focus solely on students' academic achievement fails to consider or address other issues in students' lives. All students who come into school bring unique perspectives and circumstances that will affect their academic performance. Education professionals must consider all of them when designing and implementing learning strategies.

One way to do so is by implementing the Whole Child approach. According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the Whole Child approach “transitions from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children.”¹ It’s valuable to everyone invested in a child’s life, including educators, family members, community members and policymakers.



Tenets of the Whole Child

The ACSD's Whole Child Action Plan Guide explains, "A school committed to the whole child, not only in words but in actions, is one where the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional needs of students are intentionally addressed throughout classroom curriculum, instruction, and assessment, staff development, school culture, and family and community engagement. What this looks like in practice, and how schools work toward attaining this whole child vision, will vary by context. Like every student, every school has unique histories, resources, interests, and needs that an effective whole child approach will reflect."

The Action Plan opens by saying, "We empower educators to achieve excellence in learning, teaching, and leading so that every child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged." Below, we explore these five tenets of the Whole Child approach.



Five Tenets of the Whole Child

Healthy

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

To reach this goal, schools must go beyond academic achievement to consider and reinforce the well-being of each student. This involves addressing the physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions of health to ensure that each child’s needs are met. It calls for evaluation of the environment and support that are provided at school. Do students have access to healthy lunch menus and regular recess? Are they provided with health and physical education? How easy is it for them to access mental health resources, such as school counseling, especially in light of the current shortage of social workers?



School communities adopting the Whole Child approach commit to supporting and reinforcing the health and well-being of each student through the school culture, facility and environment. This includes:

- Providing health education curriculum and instruction
- Delivering physical education schedule, curriculum and instruction that address lifetime fitness knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills



Five Tenets of the Whole Child

Healthy

School communities adopting the Whole Child approach commit to supporting and reinforcing the health and well-being of each student through the school culture, facility and environment. This includes:

- Addressing the health and wellbeing of each staff member.
- Collaborating with parents and the local community.
- Integrating health and wellbeing into the school's ongoing activities, professional development, curriculum and assessment practices.
- Establishing realistic goals, built on accurate data and sound science, for student and staff health.
- Facilitating student and staff access to health, mental health and dental services.
- Supporting, promoting and reinforcing healthy eating patterns and food safety in routine food services and special programming and events for students and staff.



Five Tenets of the Whole Child

Safe



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

At any moment, students may be experiencing a variety of profound difficulties such as poverty, housing and food insecurity, abuse or neglect, none of which disappears when a student arrives at school. The toxic stress produced by adversity affects learning and behavior. However, each adult in a child’s life can make a positive and lasting impact. Nurturing, stable relationships with adults and school professionals can buffer the effects of hardship.

To help keep children safe, education professionals can ensure that school provides a physically secure and comfortable environment. School communities enacting the Whole Child approach commit to maintaining buildings, grounds, playground equipment and vehicles that are secure and meet all established safety and environmental standards. They agree that each school’s physical plant will be attractive, structurally sound and free of defects, with good internal (hallways) and external (pedestrian, bicycle, and motor vehicle) traffic flow, including for people with special needs.



Five Tenets of the Whole Child

To create a physical, emotional, academic and social school climate that's safe, friendly and student-centered, in which students feel valued, respected, cared for and motivated to learn, each school:

- Provides students, staff, and family members with regular opportunities for learning and support in teaching students how to manage their own behavior and reinforcing expectations, rules and routines
- Fosters a community in which staff, students and family members establish and maintain school and classroom behavioral expectations, rules and routines that teach students how to manage their behavior and help them improve problem behavior
- Teaches, models and provides opportunities to practice social-emotional skills, including effective listening, conflict resolution, problem solving, personal reflection and responsibility, and ethical decision-making.
- Upholds social justice and equity concepts and practices mutual respect for individual differences at all levels of school interactions—student-to-student, adult-to-student and adult-to-adult
- Maintains a climate, curriculum and instruction that reflect high expectations and an understanding of child and adolescent growth and development
- Employs teachers and staff who develop and implement academic and behavioral interventions based on an understanding of child and adolescent development and learning theories



Five Tenets of the Whole Child

Engaged

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

School communities can build student engagement inside and outside the classroom. In the classroom, educators in Whole Child-centered schools implement active learning strategies, such as project-based learning and group work, to help students connect with their peers. They employ multiple inquiry-based, experiential learning tasks and activities. Curricula and instruction promote students’ understanding of the real world, global relevance and application of learned content.

These schools prioritize:

- Offering a range of opportunities for students to contribute to and learn within the community at large, including service learning, internships, apprenticeships and volunteer projects
- Creating policies and a climate that reinforce citizenship and civic behaviors by students, family members and staff, and include meaningful participation in decision-making
- Using curriculum-related experiences such as field trips and outreach projects to complement and extend curriculum and instruction
- Ensuring that each student has access to a wide array of extracurricular and cocurricular activities that reflect student interests, goals and learning profiles
- Having staff work closely with students to help them monitor and direct their own progress
- Expecting and preparing students to assume age-appropriate responsibility for learning through effective decision-making, goal-setting, and time management
- Supporting, promoting and reinforcing responsible environmental habits through recycling, trash management, sustainable energy and other efforts



Five Tenets of the Whole Child

Supported

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

To be effective, the support addressed in this tenet has to come from a network of caring adults in a student’s life. It requires analysis of all relationships present in a school environment. Education professionals can advance these efforts by creating a welcoming environment for families to be partners in their students’ education. Further, students must have access to school counselors and emotional support systems.

In a Whole Child-focused school community, the entire staff is well-qualified and properly credentialed. All adults who interact with students within the school and through extracurricular, cocurricular and community-based experiences teach and model prosocial behavior.

Whole Child-active school communities commit to:

- Personalizing learning through the flexible use of time and scheduling
- Using a range of diagnostic, formative and summative assessment tasks to monitor student progress, provide timely feedback and adjust teaching-learning activities to maximize student progress
- Ensuring that adult-student relationships support and encourage each student’s academic and personal growth
- Seeing to it that each student has access to school counselors and other structured academic, social and emotional support systems



Five Tenets of the Whole Child

Supported

Whole Child-active school communities commit to:

- Understanding and making curricular, instructional and school improvement decisions based on child and adolescent development and student performance information
- Welcoming and including all families as partners in their children's education and significant members of the school community
- Using a variety of methods across languages and cultures to communicate with all families and community members about the school's vision, mission, goals, activities and opportunities for students
- Helping families understand available services, advocate for their children's needs and support their learning



Five Tenets of the Whole Child

Challenged

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

The ultimate goal of K-12 education is to prepare students to succeed in their next steps in life. This requires equipping students with critical thinking, problem-solving and communication skills that will help them navigate the world. To be successful, education professionals must consider the unique challenges that students will face when they leave school and work toward higher goals. Do they have opportunities to learn with appropriate technology? Does the curriculum help them develop a global awareness? What extracurricular and community opportunities are provided to help students grow academically and personally?

Whole Child-active school communities commit to:



- Ensuring that each student has access to challenging, comprehensive curriculum in all content areas
- Providing curriculum and instruction that:
 - Offer opportunities to develop critical thinking and reasoning skills, problem-solving competencies and technological proficiency



Five Tenets of the Whole Child

Challenged

- Include evidence-based strategies to prepare students for further education, career and citizenship
- Develop global awareness and competencies, including understanding of language and culture
- Utilizing curriculum, instruction and assessment that demonstrate high expectations for each student
- Collecting and using qualitative and quantitative data to support student academic and personal growth
- Working with families to help all students understand the connection between education and lifelong success
- Offering and supporting extracurricular, cocurricular and community-based programs that provide experiences relevant to higher education, career and citizenship; monitoring and assessing them to ensure students' academic and personal growth
- Providing cross-curricular opportunities for learning with and through technology



How The Whole Child Model's Five Tenets Can Drive Academic Excellence?

In a previous post, I had shed light on the whole child model and how it is using a practical and direct approach to improve students' cognitive, mental, social, physical and academic development, rather than merely focusing on marks.

So, let's take a look at the five key points that form the basis of the whole child model.

Importance of Staying Healthy

Students should be encouraged to work on their physical and mental health at an early age in order to do better in school. An insufficient number of children indulge in regular physical activity, due to which they continuously miss classes and pay less attention to studies. Childhood obesity, mental illness, poor eating habits are some of the common issues that plague children who are short of being physically fit.

This is why teachers need to ensure their students remain healthy. It may sound simple but the brutal sit-at-home, rote learning model can be a huge challenge. As educators, we need to have an effective action-plan of keeping students engaged in regular physical activities during school time.

Importance of Making Students Feel Safe

Students must always feel safe in and around the school campus for an increased sense of participation and academic achievement. Friendly staff, robust anti-bullying policy and the right to question are some of the measures that can help students feel mentally secure in their place of learning.



How The Whole Child Model's Five Tenets Can Drive Academic Excellence?

Importance of Driving Engagement Among Students

Engagement has become an essential ingredient for a thriving classroom environment. Students, when engaged and motivated both in school and at home, show better results in their performance.

Fortunately, modern ed-tech tools have the ability to make learning fun and interesting. An integrated progressive curriculum, paired with age-appropriate learning activities, gives students extra motivation to succeed.

Importance of Supporting Your Students

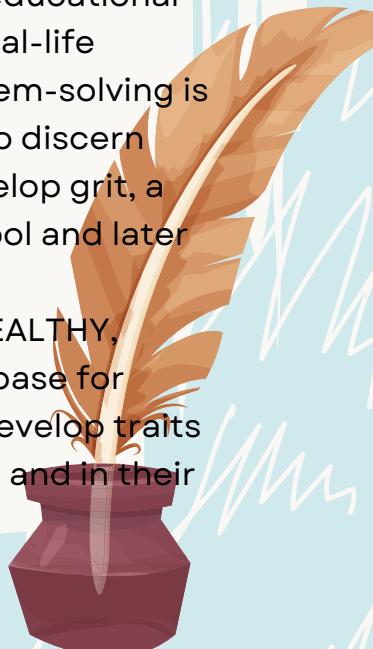
A constant hand of support from teachers, parents and peers can matter a lot to a student. It can make a world of difference to them knowing that we are on their side, that we are also a part of their highs and lows.

In a learning environment where teacher-student relationships are built on trust, support and encouragement, you can see a sharp improvement in their results -- and significantly lower rates of social and emotional problems.

The Importance of Intellectually Challenging Your Students

Students need to be challenged at every level to hone their educational competence. A progressive curriculum that encompasses real-life learnings can help students solve problems creatively. Problem-solving is a key part of a child's development because s/he can learn to discern and distinguish a solvable problem. As a result, they can develop grit, a crucial trait that can carry them through tough times in school and later years.

To sum up, the five tenets of whole child model -- SAFETY, HEALTHY, ENGAGEMENT, SUPPORT & CHALLENGE -- can build a strong base for students and leave a lasting impact on them. These tenets develop traits that can help students succeed in school, academics, sports and in their future career.



Tenets of the Whole Child Principle

The whole child approach is guided by several key tenets that shape its implementation and philosophy. These tenets highlight the core principles and priorities of supporting children's comprehensive development. Here are some key tenets of the whole child:

- 1. Holistic Development:** The whole child approach recognizes that children's development is multi-dimensional, encompassing their cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and moral growth. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of these domains and aims to address each aspect to promote well-rounded development.
- 2. Individualized Support:** Each child is unique, with distinct strengths, needs, and interests. The whole child approach emphasizes individualized support and tailored learning experiences to meet each child's specific requirements. It takes into account their diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities, ensuring that all children receive appropriate and equitable opportunities for growth.
- 3. Integrated Curriculum:** The whole child approach promotes a curriculum that integrates various subjects, skills, and experiences. It goes beyond focusing solely on academic content and encourages interdisciplinary learning, problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and real-world applications. The integration of subjects helps children make connections, deepen understanding, and develop a broader range of competencies.
- 4. Inclusive Environment:** Creating an inclusive environment is fundamental to the whole child approach. It recognizes and values diversity in all its forms, including cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and ability differences. Inclusion involves providing appropriate accommodations, removing barriers to learning, and fostering a sense of belonging for all children, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances.



Tenets of the Whole Child Principle

5. Well-being and Safety: Children's well-being and safety are paramount in the whole child approach. It acknowledges that emotional and physical health significantly influence their ability to learn and thrive. Prioritizing their well-being involves promoting mental health, fostering positive relationships, addressing social-emotional needs, and ensuring a physically safe and supportive learning environment.

6. Collaboration and Partnerships: The whole child approach recognizes that supporting children's holistic development requires collaboration among educators, families, communities, and various stakeholders. It promotes partnerships to create a seamless network of support, enabling information sharing, coordinated efforts, and shared responsibility in nurturing children's growth and well-being.

7. Lifelong Learning: The whole child approach aims to cultivate a love for learning and instill a passion for lifelong learning in children. It recognizes that education is a continuous process that extends beyond formal schooling. It fosters curiosity, self-directed learning, adaptability, and resilience, preparing children to become active, engaged learners throughout their lives.

By adhering to these tenets, the whole child approach strives to provide a comprehensive and balanced education that supports children's overall well-being, fosters their individual growth, and prepares them to be responsible and successful members of society.

