

What is Whole Child Education and why support it?

You may hear the term “whole child” batted around at your school or in the educational setting where you work. It sounds good; something easy to support just by nature of the words involved. However, you may find yourself asking: “What does ‘whole child’ actually mean?” Ask any group of teachers or administrators this question and you will receive a variety of answers. You may hear references to social and emotional learning, physical activity, nutrition, or alternative learning environments. All of these elements are part of whole child education, but there is much more. So, if your colleagues say that they are supportive of Whole Child Education, what are they really saying?

The ASCD defines Whole Child as an approach *“to transition from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children.”* Additionally, ASCD’s Whole Child framework focuses on *five primary tenets*, envisioning that each student attending school will be:

Supported - Students have access to personalized learning and are supported by qualified, caring adults.

Challenged - Students are challenged academically and prepared for success in post-secondary learning, future employment, and participation in a global environment.

Healthy - Students enter school healthy, and learn about and practice healthy lifestyles.

Safe - Students learn in a physically and emotionally safe environment.

Engaged - Students are actively engaged in learning and are connected to the school and broader community.

Through this approach, ASCD supports educators, families, community members, and

policymakers as they move from a vision about educating the whole child to sustainable, collaborative actions. Schools supported by their community with coordinated policies and practices that prioritize any or all of the five tenets see greater academic performance and engagement among all of their students. This coordinated approach includes partnerships and strategies that support student learning throughout the educational system. Ultimately, these strategies meet each student where they are in learning and life. Students who enter school doors each day knowing that the adults in those learning



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environments care about them, see them for all that they are, and work to meet them academically and personally to ensure their success in and out of the classroom are able to experience the five tenets of the Whole Child. They feel that their teachers care deeply about their learning, not because of assessment outcomes, but instead because learning means they are better equipped to achieve their individualized goals and a more fulfilling life.

WHY someone supports the Whole Child is an individual call to action. We can pull from Simon Sinek's highly regarded TEDTalk on "How great leaders inspire action."

(https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action) His message appeals to leaders, including classroom teachers throughout the state, to focus on answering the question: "What is your WHY?" Your WHAT may be to provide instruction in Algebra, assess and mentor new teachers, or even coach swimming. It is when you know the WHY of your work that you are able to find meaning and inspire purpose in those around you – including your students. My WHY is to ensure that students are provided with optimal learning environments that are supported, challenged, healthy, safe, and engaged. I encourage you to watch the video and take a few minutes to reflect about your WHY – and then we should address our HOW.

Ensuring access to and support for WHOLE CHILD EDUCATION is WHY I go to work every day. If your WHY includes aspects of health, security, engagement, challenge, and support for students – you may be a WHOLE CHILD educator. I hope we can work together to determine HOW to implement it in a student-centered, inclusive, and equitable way. Here's a start:

Whole Child Indicators: <http://www.wholechildeducation.org/assets/content/mx-resources/wholechildindicators-all.pdf>

School Improvement Tool: <http://sitool.ascd.org/Default.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2f>

Teaching the Whole Child: <https://qtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/TeachingtheWholeChild.pdf>

Whole Child Video: <http://www.ascd.org/whole-child.aspx>

Whole Child Network: <http://www.ascd.org/programs/The-Whole-Child/Whole-Child-Network.aspx>

The Washington State ASCD brings this same vision to our state through professional development, leadership, and recognition of model schools and educators through the Whole Child Awards.

If you know a great educator or school who exemplifies what it means to support Whole Child Education, nominate them for Washington ASCD's Whole Child Award at <http://wsascd.org/awards-overview/>. Nominees will be expected to submit a formal application. Applications will be accepted starting on February 2 through April 13, 2018.

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