The Whole Child Approach: Relating the Five Tenets to Curriculum and Instruction

Engaged

New initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards continue to raise the bar in terms of what students are expected to know and be able to do in order to be successful 21st century learners and citizens. The idea of being college and career ready is not just a goal but an expectation, and requires prompt modifications to current curriculum and instruction practices to build students' intelligence, character, and motivation.

Keeping students **engaged** in their education is a vital tenet of the whole child approach. "Students who are engaged and connected to their schools demonstrate increased academic achievement, attendance rates, and participation in activities" (ASCD, 2013b). Here are some ways to support student engagement through curriculum and instruction and school practices.

Introduce Project-Based Learning

One way to foster student engagement is to center instruction around active learning that incorporates student interest and real-world problems. Using project-based learning, students investigate a question or issue and produce a product, or "project," that is authentic and relevant to them (ASCD, 2013a). Through these projects, students gain experiences which sharpen their critical-thinking abilities, develop mature social skills, and help achieve academic success.

Though students have often worked in groups from the time they enter formal school, the success of project-based learning is contingent upon cooperative learning. Project-based learning incorporates the five elements of cooperative learning as defined in *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement, 2nd Edition*. These elements are positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small-group skills, and group processing (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012).

Contribute to the Community At Large

Giving students—as well as teachers—the opportunity to consistently work with community members outside of school walls increases their exposure to public issues, can aid in building mature social skills, and gives them the chance to transfer knowledge gained in the classroom to a different setting. Use these suggestions as a guide to getting students involved in the community:

- Have "highly recommended" days of community service (before, during, or after school).
- Have students read to younger elementary students and talk to them about the importance of lifelong learning.
- Organize a food drive to help the less fortunate.
- Invite members of assisted-living residences to watch a school play.

Allow Students to Monitor Their Own Progress

By making use of formative assessments, teachers have the ability to share with students their progress on different topics without necessarily assigning them a grade. Students will take an interest in knowing how well they are grasping material, take note of areas for improvement, and make use of this information to make necessary adjustments. Formative assessments include

- exit cards
- pop quizzes
- small-group discussions
- general, day-to-day classroom observations

Challenged

Our day-to-day lives are often changing at such a rapid pace that it's difficult to even think about the skills and qualifications needed to succeed in the not-so-distant future. More so than ever, postsecondary educations and career fields are hoping that today's students are learning to be critical thinkers with high levels of communication and problem-solving skills. Schools, districts, and community institutions can provide students with a rich and challenging curriculum that educates "the whole child by working together to prepare young people for success in higher

education, employment, and civic life by providing meaningful learning experiences and opportunities to demonstrate achievement" (ASCD, 2013b).

Here are some of the indicators for a challenging curriculum:

- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment demonstrate high expectations for each student.
- Curriculum and instruction provide opportunities for students to develop critical-thinking and reasoning skills, problem-solving competencies, and technology proficiency.
- Curriculum and instruction develop students' global awareness and competencies, including understanding of language and culture.

For a complete list, download the set of whole child **challenged** indicators (PDF).

The Power of Choice

David Suarez, author of the *Educational Leadership* article "When Students Choose the Challenge," discusses the benefits to both students and educators when students "flex their muscles" and make choices on what they want to learn. He asserts that students should choose "tasks that were just challenging enough" to make learning "interesting but not overwhelming" (2007, p. 61).

Furthermore, he summarizes Glasser's (1986) choice theory, which states that empowering students to select their own level gives three major benefits:

- Students find choices motivating—often the key to achievement for middle schoolers.
- Students benefit from the opportunity to make decisions. Learning to reflect on personal learning and adjust tasks accordingly is a great skill for middle school students.
- Students can't conclude that a grouping decision made on their behalf is unfair or inappropriate.

Supported

While the Whole Child Tenets are largely school based, they require the inclusion of the entire community to ensure that each child receives the education they deserve (ASCD, 2013b). This is especially true of one tenet in the Whole Child Initiative—supported. Schools and communities

embracing the whole child approach strive to provide each child with access to personalized learning that is provided by qualified, supportive adults.

Here are some supported indicators that can be used as goals, a needs assessment, or a framework for informed decision making toward modifying your curriculum and instruction:

- • Our teachers use 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.
- • Our school staff understands and makes curricular, instructional, and school improvement decisions based on child and adolescent development and student performance information.

For a complete list, download the set of whole child **supported** indicators (PDF).

Safe

When teachers, administrators, and other educators talk about making schools, districts, and communities safer environments, it is easy to immediately think about bullying, school violence, and the like. Schools may launch into plans to purchase new surveillance equipment, hire additional security, and enforce zero tolerance policies for serious infractions.

The ability to increase the "safety" of each student through curricular and instructional modifications is an important part of the whole child approach to education. Students who feel safe—and valued—in their schools have higher levels of academic achievement and increased levels of motivation.

The following safe indicators are reflections of the whole child approach to education through curriculum and instruction:

- • Our students feel valued, respected, and cared for and are motivated to learn.
- • Our school 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.
- • Our school climate, curriculum, and instruction reflect both high expectations and an understanding of child and adolescent growth and development.

- • Our teachers and staff develop and implement academic and behavioral interventions based on an understanding of child and adolescent development and learning theories.

For a complete list, download the set of whole child **safe** indicators (PDF).

Healthy

Students that are emotionally and physically healthy display many of the same characteristics: they miss fewer classes, are less likely to engage in risky or antisocial behavior, concentrate more, and achieve higher test scores (ASCD, 2013b). Unfortunately, initiatives such as NCLB and economic constraints have forced schools across the country to make cuts across the board, including to health and physical education. Schools participating in the whole child approach take the "healthy" tenet seriously, an action that is regularly reflected through curriculum and instruction.

The following healthy indicators are reflections of the whole child approach to education through curriculum and instruction:

- • Our school health education curriculum and instruction support and reinforce the health and well-being of each student by addressing the physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of health.
- • Our school physical education schedule, curriculum, and instruction support and reinforce the health and well-being of each student by addressing lifetime fitness knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills.
- • Our school integrates health and well-being into the school's ongoing activities, professional development, curriculum, and assessment practices.
- • Our school supports, promotes, and reinforces healthy eating patterns and food safety in routine food services and special programming and events for students and staff.

For a complete list, download the set of whole child **healthy** indicators (PDF).

References

ASCD. (2013a). *Project-based learning: An answer to the Common Core challenge: An ASCD PD Online course*. Retrieved from pdo.ascd.org

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