

**Position Paper:  
EDUCATING THE WHOLE CHILD**

A Whole Child education recognizes the importance and value of a comprehensive, multifaceted model of teaching and learning that occurs within a safe and supportive learning environment. The Whole Child model addresses and fosters the physical-psychological-social-emotional-intellectual aspects of a child’s development, creating a balance that is critical.

New York State PTA supports the ongoing efforts of the New York State Board of Regents and the New York State Education Department to establish and maintain high academic standards that support the whole child. Learning standards, curriculum and instruction that reflect a Whole Child approach will stimulate varied, individualized pathways to learning for all children.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PTA**

New York State PTA, its units, councils and regions, will advocate that all children:

- are “healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged” in educational settings that promote “long term development and success.”<sup>i</sup>
- have an equal opportunity to develop to their fullest potential with life skills that include: “digital, media, and informational literacy to evaluate content and use technology effectively; life and career competencies such as flexibility, time and project management, and self-direction; cultural awareness; leadership; and responsibility.”<sup>ii</sup>
- are provided NYS learning standards that incorporate a Whole Child social-emotional approach supporting students as they become college and/or career ready.
- have a school climate that fosters the development of healthy lifestyles through comprehensive programs such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Health (WSCC)”<sup>iii</sup> initiative.
- will be educated in schools with policies that strengthen family and community engagement as an integral part of the success of the whole child; “support parent education and family literacy programs in addition to individualized, ongoing, and job-embedded professional development for educators.”<sup>iv</sup>
- will experience cooperation among family, school, and community in building and supporting protective environments that will nurture resiliency in youth. This should include children being connected to at least one adult in the school building who they feel cares about them and wants them to succeed.
- are engaged in civility, citizenship, tolerance and character education<sup>v</sup> that supports the social, emotional and ethical development.

**BACKGROUND**

According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the five tenets of The Whole Child are:

- 1) Each student enters school healthy and learns and practices a healthy lifestyle.
- 2) Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe.
- 3) Each student actively engages in his/her own learning and experiences connections to the school and broader community.
- 4) Each student receives personalized learning and support from qualified, caring adults.
- 5) Each student experiences academic challenges and prepares for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.<sup>vi</sup>

In looking at the whole child, we need to change the education conversation from a narrow definition of academic achievement to one that encompasses a much broader vision. Teaching a well-balanced curriculum, based on the Whole Child approach—one that allows for physical activity and socialization; that challenges and inspires learning and motivates

everyone in the classroom, students and teacher alike. Whether the subject is art, music, foreign language, field trips, sports, or recess – these ALL contribute to preparing the whole child academically, socially, and emotionally for civic participation and personal growth. In an environment of diminishing fiscal support educators and school systems must continue to value and support varied subject area opportunities.

According to the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institutes for Research, students need to build social-emotional skills in order to be successful in mastering college and career ready standards. Students who “become frustrated or confused...must learn how to persevere in meeting...new standards. If they do not know how to manage or regulate the emotions they have during school (e.g., joy, jealousy, frustration, relief), their mental resources will not be used for academic learning.”<sup>vii</sup> Research shows that “when students develop social emotional competencies, they are more motivated to learn and committed to school (as seen through improved attendance and graduation rates), and they are less likely to act out in class, get suspended, or be held back.”<sup>viii</sup>

“To be prepared for well-paying jobs and lifelong learning, New York’s children need personalized support, safe environments, good health, and challenging learning opportunities.”<sup>ix</sup> Therefore, in building a whole child educational perspective, schools must collaborate with families and community support groups to provide educational opportunities along with supportive, healthy learning environments before, during and after school.

New York State PTA supports a Whole Child, student-centered educational approach that results in healthy, well-rounded, resilient children. Balancing learning standards with social-emotional programming and family engagement will create a developmentally appropriate way to help children to become knowledgeable, responsible, compassionate adults and citizens of the world.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy-priorities/vol21/num02/A-Lex>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy-priorities/vol21/num02/A-Lexicon-for-Educating-the-Whole-Child-%28and-Preparing-the-Whole-Adult%29.aspx>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/wsec/index.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/wholechild/snapshot/2014/NY-ASCD-Whole-Child-Snapshot.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.wholechildeducation.org/assets/content/mx-resources/WholeChild-MakingTheCase.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/TeachingtheWholeChild.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/TeachingtheWholeChild.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/wholechild/snapshot/2014/NY-ASCD-Whole-Child-Snapshot.pdf>