

Educating the Whole Child:  
The New Learning Compact

# The Community Conversations Project

A Guide for Informal Discussion Groups



ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

[WWW.ASCD.ORG](http://WWW.ASCD.ORG)

## INTRODUCTION

**E**ducating the Whole Child: The New Learning Compact is an initiative by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) that advocates a comprehensive approach to learning and teaching. We recognize successful young people must be not only knowledgeable when they graduate from school, but also emotionally and physically healthy, civically engaged, responsible, and caring. We believe every child deserves a 21st century education that fully prepares him or her for college, work, and citizenship.

ASCD has developed a new Whole Child Compact that identifies the major components of the whole child initiative:

- 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*, prepared for success in college or further study, and for employment in a global environment.

From this compact, we are proposing a five-point action agenda (see p. 7) that elaborates on the initiative and provides a framework around which we can focus our efforts.

But we want to know what you think. Where do students, parents, educators, community advocates and business leaders stand on these issues? How can communitywide organizations and businesses help public schools achieve these goals? Can we agree on

a basic set of principles regarding how we educate our community's children?

To help answer these questions and inspire conversations, ASCD has launched the Whole Child Community Conversations Project, which will allow local communities to explore how to work together to support the whole child. Some communities may choose a more formal, communitywide event, while others may prefer smaller discussion groups. This guide is designed for those interested in more informal group conversations. It contains tips and guiding questions to initiate conversations among small groups ranging from 8 to 12 people representing your school, community, or neighborhood.

For more detailed information about the Whole Child Community Conversations Project or helpful tools for conversations, visit [www.ascd.org/wholechild](http://www.ascd.org/wholechild).

Questions? Please contact [wholechild@ascd.org](mailto:wholechild@ascd.org).

### WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Measures of success for the Whole Child Community Conversations Project:

- Increased understanding among local stakeholders about the whole child approach to learning
- Better decision making that is informed by community input and that leads to a more comprehensive approach to learning for children
- Shared commitment to pursue recommendations from the community conversations that focus on a whole child approach to learning

## PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL SMALL-GROUP CONVERSATION

Small-group discussions allow participants to discuss and weigh in on issues important to them. Done well, the process can result in a common vision and shared responsibility for an issue. The following are some best practices to consider when designing small-group conversations about educating the whole child:

- Be inclusive when recruiting participants. Actively recruiting participants who reflect the community’s diversity in ethnicity, culture, perspectives, gender, and age results in a richer dialogue.
- Invite new ideas and a spirited give and take of issues focusing on the whole child approach to learning.
- Explore a series of ongoing conversations about educating the whole child from different perspectives.
- Consider expanding the size of the group based on interest and commitment.
- Share the results with ASCD and local decision makers or influential leaders.

- Contact ASCD for more information about initiating a broader, communitywide conversation.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

Does educating the whole child matter? If it does, what is the reaction of students, teachers, community members, business leaders, health care specialists, youth advocates, and others to ASCD’s proposed five-point action agenda? We have developed a framework of guiding questions to find answers to these issues.

ASCD suggests the following guiding questions to help foster a focused and meaningful small-group conversation. Feel free to add questions or further customize with local examples and data. You might decide on a one-time conversation with from 8 to 12 participants or an ongoing series of conversations based on parts one through three.

PART ONE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO EDUCATE THE WHOLE CHILD?	
Guiding Questions	Tools & Handouts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the phrase “to educate the whole child” mean to you?</li> <li>• What does a curriculum that educates the whole child look like to you?</li> <li>• What are your hopes and fears about educating the whole child?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handout describing the whole child initiative and ASCD’s proposed five-point action agenda.</li> </ul>

**PART TWO: WHAT IS YOUR REACTION TO ASCD’S PROPOSED FIVE-POINT ACTION AGENDA?**

Guiding Questions	Tools & Handouts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are public schools in our community doing now to ensure a whole child approach to learning?</li> <li>• Does our vision of a 21<sup>st</sup> century education match what is currently happening in our schools?</li> <li>• What is your reaction to ASCD’s proposed five-point agenda?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grade Your School Community report card</li> <li>• ASCD’s proposed five-point action agenda</li> <li>• Handout with examples of best practices, if possible, from the local district and/or other districts, schools and states</li> </ul>

**PART THREE: WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN EDUCATING THE WHOLE CHILD?**

Guiding Questions	Tools & Handouts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What one change must be made in local policy or practice to educate the whole child in our schools?</li> <li>• What one thing would your stakeholder group (e.g., teachers, students, business leaders, health advocates, the arts community, etc.) be willing to do to help us get there?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handout with different strategies for each constituency group</li> </ul>

**SELECT A FACILITATOR AND A RECORDER**

Choosing a skilled facilitator and recorder will help ensure all voices are heard and conversations are well-documented. The facilitator is responsible for creating a safe environment, keeping the conversation focused and managing time. The facilitator also should set group norms, such as avoiding personal attacks and respecting diversity of opinions.

The recorder works closely with the facilitator to capture key issues, areas of agreement and disagreement, and lingering questions. The recorder must have superior listening skills, take accurate notes, and be able to summarize information well.

**RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS**

The discussion group may range from multiple stakeholders representing different constituencies

to a specific group such as teachers, students, youth advocates, or business leaders.

Some tips for recruitment:

- Strive for a diversity in opinion, ethnicity, race, gender, and age that reflects the makeup of the community.
- Avoid inviting only the “usual suspects.”
- Start recruitment efforts early.
- Explain what contribution participants will make, why their involvement is valued, and how their feedback will inform next steps.
- Make personal contact, if possible, when inviting participants.
- Leverage personal connections to ensure good participation.

### IDENTIFY A LOCATION

A neutral, welcoming, and easily accessible location sets the right tone. For more informal conversations, consider more relaxed locations where participants are most comfortable. For example, options might include the host's living room, the teacher's lounge, a conference room in a library or community center, or a large table at a neighborhood restaurant. The room setup should include a focal point to welcome participants, wall space for flip chart notes and plenty of room for participants to sit comfortably in a group.

### DOCUMENT THE CONVERSATION

ASCD is eager to learn more about the issues raised in your small-group discussion that focus on providing every child with a well-rounded education. After your discussion, please take a few minutes to email as much of the following information as possible to [wholechild@ascd.org](mailto:wholechild@ascd.org):

- A summary of key themes, questions, concerns, and compelling quotes from participants
- Action steps
- A list of participants and the stakeholder groups they represent

Participants' interest and commitment will likely wane if they do not feel their input is valued. We suggest sending a brief follow-up note to participants thanking them and including a one- to two-page report of findings and action steps. Invite participants to stay involved.



### WHOM SHOULD YOU INVITE TO PARTICIPATE?

You may decide to conduct a discussion group of from 8 to 12 individuals representing a mix of these groups or focus on one group in particular.

- Students
- Parents
- Teachers
- Principals
- School board members
- Leaders of community-based organizations (health, arts, youth advocacy, music, sports, recreation, etc.)
- Business owners
- Senior citizens
- Community leaders
- City and county government officials
- Representatives from higher education



SAMPLE AGENDA FOR A WHOLE CHILD COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

<p>Whole Child Community Conversations Project          Anyplace, Anywhere          Insert Date          Insert Location          6:00 – 8:30 p.m.</p>	
6:00 p.m.	<p>Welcome and Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host shares information about the ASCD whole child initiative and the purpose of the discussion and makes introductions.</li> <li>• Host provides overview of the agenda.</li> </ul>
6:15 – 7:45 p.m.	<p>Discussion Begins – Parts 1 &amp; 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator asks the group to respond to the guiding questions and provides tools and handouts as needed.</li> <li>• Facilitator helps the group stay on task, clarifies points as needed, and uses handouts to provide context and capture data from the group. (During Part 2, for example, participants may use the “Grade Your School Community” tool.)</li> <li>• Recorder captures key themes and questions.</li> </ul>
7:45 p.m.	<p>Short Break</p>
7:50 p.m.	<p>Discussion Continues – Part 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants discuss what role they may be willing to play to advance the whole child agenda.</li> <li>• Facilitator keeps group on task while recorder captures major themes. Facilitator uses handout to give participants ideas of how their stakeholder group can help advance a whole child approach to learning.</li> </ul>
8:15 p.m.	<p>Summary and Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator summarizes major findings, discusses next steps and thanks participants for their time, noting that each participant will receive a follow-up memo in the mail capturing key themes and next steps. Participants are encouraged to attend the next large-group community conversation, if applicable.</li> <li>• Facilitators fill out meeting evaluation forms, which are collected before participants leave.</li> <li>• Small-group discussion notes, sign-in sheets with participants’ contact information and meeting evaluation forms are collected for review, analysis and submission to ASCD.</li> </ul>
8:30 p.m.	<p>Adjourn</p>

## ACTION AGENDA

**A**SCD calls on parents, educators, policymakers and communities to join forces to ensure our children become productive, engaged citizens. Our children deserve an education that emphasizes academic rigor as well as the essential 21st century skills of critical thinking and creativity. Specifically, our students must be

### HEALTHY

To ensure that all students are healthy, ASCD recommends, at a minimum:

- Schools have a health advisory council with students, family, community, and business members
- Students are routinely screened for immunizations and vision, hearing, dental, and orthopedic concerns
- Physical Education and health classes emphasize lifetime healthy behaviors
- Healthy food choices are available at school

### SAFE AND SECURE

To ensure that all students are safe, ASCD recommends, at a minimum:

- Students, school staff, and family members establish and maintain behavioral expectations, rules, and routines
- Families are welcomed by school staff as partners in their children's education

### ENGAGED

To ensure that all students are adequately engaged, ASCD recommends, at a minimum:

- Students may participate in a wide array of extracurricular activities
- Schools provide opportunities for community-based apprenticeships, internships, or projects
- Teachers use active learning strategies such as cooperative learning and project-based learning

### SUPPORTED

To ensure that all students are adequately supported, ASCD recommends, at a minimum:

- Every student has an adult advisor or mentor
- Students have access to school counselors or other student support systems

### CHALLENGED ACADEMICALLY

To ensure that all students are challenged academically with a well-balanced curriculum, ASCD recommends, at a minimum:

- A well-rounded curriculum for all students
- Access to rigorous programs in arts, foreign languages, and social studies
- Flexible graduation requirements



### SUPPORT FROM ASCD

An ASCD representative is available to answer any questions and is eager to learn more about the issues that arose in your conversations. Please contact [wholechild@ascd.org](mailto:wholechild@ascd.org) with questions or for additional help and to share your findings.

Information from your discussion will be used to help:

- Drive changes in policy and practice to expand the whole child approach to learning in schools and communities.
- Create a shared sense of responsibility for implementing an action plan for change that extends from the classroom into the community.
- Inform future public engagement efforts.
- Provide insights for a public report of findings to be disseminated nationally. The report will analyze and synthesize findings from communities participating in the project and offer guidance on next steps.

Thank you for participating in ASCD's Whole Child Community Conversations Project!



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Visit [www.wholechildducation.org](http://www.wholechildducation.org) for more information.

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