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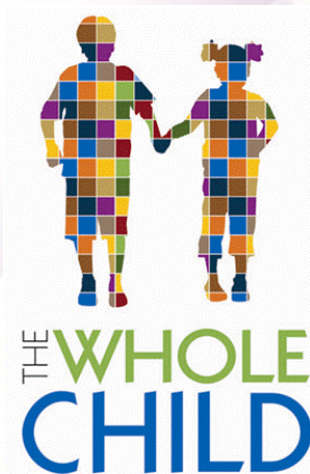


Association for Supervision  
and Curriculum Development

# All Together Now: Sharing Responsibility for the Whole Child

by

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*For the Commission on the Whole Child  
convened by the  
Association for Supervision  
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## About the Commission on the Whole Child

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The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) commissioned *All Together Now: Sharing Responsibility for the Whole Child*, by Martin Blank and Amy Berg, as a resource document for the Commission on the Whole Child, which held its final meeting July 6–8, 2006, in Washington, D.C. The Commission, convened by ASCD, is composed of a group of leading thinkers, researchers, and practitioners from a wide variety of sectors to recast the current focus of schools.

Why has ASCD convened the Commission on the Whole Child? Parents, teachers, and the community believe schools should focus on developing students who are academically proficient **and** physically and emotionally healthy **and** respectful, responsible, and caring. They want graduates who contribute to the community and the world and are productive at work, at home, and at leisure. The public believes schools should develop the entire child, not just the academic child. And they want this for each child, not just for already-advantaged children.

If stakeholders believe schools are responsible for developing the whole child, what needs to change? If decisions about programs started with “What works for the child?” how would resources—time, space, and human—be arrayed to ensure each child’s success? What would happen if community resources were arrayed in support of children reaching their potential as whole young adults? If the student were truly at the center of the system, what could be achieved?

The paper is designed to help the Commission address these questions and others by providing a compelling overview of the complexity and challenges of U.S. education. ASCD will provide additional information about the Commission on the Whole Child and its work during the coming months.

Gene R. Carter  
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# All Together Now: Sharing Responsibility for the Whole Child



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*“To the doctor, the child is a typhoid patient; to the playground supervisor, a first baseman; to the teacher, a learner of arithmetic. At times, he may be different things to each of these specialists, but too rarely he is a whole child to any of them.”*

*—White House Conference on Children and Youth, 1930*

Anyone who spends time around young children can see that they develop along a variety of domains: social, emotional, physical, cognitive, civic, and moral. They can also see that these developmental domains are linked—as young children learn to share toys and develop social ties to other children, their moral and cognitive growth is enhanced. As they grow physically and become more curious and engaged in the world around them, they develop new cognitive strengths. As their cognitive ability expands, they have even more opportunities to enhance their full range of competencies. Each domain is influenced and enhanced by the others, and each domain must be nurtured and supported as children grow.

In today’s education policy environment, there is little question that the primary emphasis is on the cognitive domain—measured in terms of student performance on standardized tests. While opinions differ on the

degree to which this narrow focus influences the way we educate our children, there is no doubt that educators feel enormous pressure to focus their attention on raising test scores. Inevitably, efforts to address any of the other developmental domains—that is, to address the needs of the whole child—are diminished.

The goals of this paper are to help the Commission think about how to develop the whole child in the context of a high-stakes testing policy and to identify strategies that would make it possible for policymakers and practitioners in education and related fields to pursue a more balanced approach to educating our children. As a first step toward achieving these goals, the paper considers the following questions:

- What are the conditions that foster the development of the whole child?
- Who is responsible for creating these conditions?
- What does it take to build and foster these conditions?

## What Are the Conditions that Foster the Development of the Whole Child?

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**Nearly a century of research has come to one conclusion: children develop along multiple, interconnected domains and when one developmental domain is ignored, other domains may suffer.<sup>1</sup>**

We know that the development of all of these interconnected domains is fostered in active, safe environments<sup>2</sup>— at home, in school and in the community— that provide varied and rich social experiences,<sup>3</sup> offer educational opportunities that build on children’s learning styles (verbal, visual, kinesthetic),<sup>4</sup> and support the basic needs of children and their families, including health, nutrition, and economic and social well-being.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, research has indicated that active learning in multiple social contexts contributes to an increase in the thickness and weight of the cerebral cortex—factors that enhance the brain’s cognitive capacity.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, motivation and learning increase when children spend time in safe settings that offer structured enrichment activities and acknowledge the student's need for control, choice, competence and belonging.<sup>7</sup>

Not only do children need multiple contexts in which to learn new information, but they also learn new information in different ways. Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences argues that individuals have a number of ways in which they comprehend, understand, and benefit from experience. Everyone has a personal blend of learning styles, with some pathways more "turned on" than others. Learning can be facilitated by activities that allow children to learn in harmony with their own unique minds.<sup>8</sup>

Nonschool factors affect the development of the whole child. *Parsing the Achievement Gap*,<sup>9</sup> published by the Educational Testing Service, identifies several nonschool factors that research says influence students' academic achievement. These factors include nutrition, parent participation in their child's school, time spent watching television, and student mobility. This study showed that minority students and those living in poverty were far more likely to face academic challenges than their higher-income peers, resulting in a widening achievement gap.

Furthermore, the mother's educational level remains a key predictor of school success,<sup>10</sup> and there is strong evidence that family involvement in children's education at home or in school has a significant impact on student performance.<sup>11</sup>

The good news is that, increasingly, research is showing that connecting all of these factors (a safe, motivating environment; enrichment; and varied learning experiences) to community yields enhanced results. When children see a connection between where and how they live and what they are learning, their interest is deepened and sustained. For instance, adolescents who participate regularly in community-based youth development programs (including arts, sports, and community service) have better academic and social outcomes—as well as higher education and

career aspirations—than other, similar teens.<sup>12</sup> We also know that when the core academic curriculum is tied to the community, removing the artificial separation between the classroom and the real world, student outcomes are improved.<sup>13</sup>

Studies also suggest that while the addition of various health, social, recreational, and other support services is essential to children's success in school, academic achievement gains will not improve significantly unless schools also improve teaching and learning. This means that it is not enough to remove nonacademic barriers. Schools must proactively enable learning through improved teacher quality, a challenging and engaging curriculum that is tied to the real world, and effective school leadership.

All of this research tells us that multiple factors influence development, and each must be addressed if we are to create the conditions in which children are most likely to learn and thrive. It also tells us that as we think about how to foster children's learning and development along these multiple domains, we must move beyond a deficit model and focus on the positive indicators that promote student success.

**The Commission is urged to identify and adopt a simple unifying framework that responds to what the research tells us about the conditions that promote the development of the whole child.**

Organizations that focus on youth development and education have begun to build frameworks that incorporate these factors. These frameworks are remarkably similar in their focus and are guided by the abundance of authoritative research on the development of the whole child. For example, the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine identified eight features of positive developmental settings: physical and physiological safety; appropriate structure; supportive relationships; opportunities to belong; positive social norms; support for efficacy and mattering; opportunities for skill building; and integration of family, school and community efforts.<sup>14</sup> The Learning First Alliance cites physical and psy-



chological safety; challenging and engaging curriculum; a sense of belonging and connection to others; and reassurance by others of their capability and worth as key factors to development.

- Condition #1: The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
- Condition #2: Students are motivated and engaged in learning—both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
- Condition #3: The basic physical, mental, and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
- Condition #4: There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families, and school staff.
- Condition #5: Community engagement, together with school efforts, promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful and connects students to a broader learning community.
- Condition #6: Early childhood development is fostered through high-quality, comprehensive programs that nurture learning and development.

Communities in Schools has its “Five Basics,”<sup>15</sup> and America’s Promise has developed a similar construct with its “Five Promises.”<sup>16</sup> These frameworks focus on the importance of caring adults, safe environments, health, effective education, and opportunities to give back to the community.

In our work at the Coalition for Community Schools, we have built and expanded on these approaches to develop what we refer to as the “conditions for learning.”<sup>17</sup> We believe that the best outcomes for students will be realized when as many conditions are in place as possible.

Our analysis of the research suggests that there are six research-based conditions that cover all the developmental domains. These conditions also reflect what most people recognize as common sense and vital to the development of the Whole Child.

While we believe—as we suspect most adults do—that creating all of these conditions leads to the most positive environment for children, we want to be clear that research on resiliency indicates that children can and do learn and develop even in the absence of some of these conditions. However, supporting young people with these conditions connects them with the protective factors that facilitate resiliency<sup>18</sup> and increases the likelihood that all young people will succeed.

### **Who Is Responsible for Creating These Conditions?**

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**The question that remains is not what do children need to succeed—the research is clear, they need supportive environments that nurture their social, emotional, physical, moral, civic and cognitive development. The question becomes, who bears responsibility for creating this environment?**

Not surprisingly, the debate over this question is both contentious and muddled. There are those who believe that families alone have sole responsibility for children’s development and that the school should only be responsible for academics. On the other hand, some believe that schools have a larger role to play and should control everything that happens in the school; they sometimes are perceived as not being good partners with others who focus on related domains of development and bring related expertise. In his recent book, *Who’s in Charge Here?*, Noel Epstein suggests that schools are already playing this role. According to Epstein, “While policymaking elites have focused for decades on academic issues, polls have shown the public to be more concerned about inadequate parental involvement in schools, student drug use, violence, gangs, and related issues. This has helped drive schools to assume responsibility for a multitude of health, social and other programs.”<sup>19</sup>

Public opinion indicates how muddled this debate is. Members of the general public reportedly believe that “bad families” and a “bad society” are responsible for poor student achievement.<sup>20</sup> They believe that families have a responsibility to create an environment in which children will thrive, and if they fail to do this, their children will have trouble succeeding academically. They see the problems and challenges in communities as barriers to learning.<sup>21</sup>

Even though the public understands that family and society are outside the control of the school, they still expect schools to address these issues. They believe that schools are responsible for both the academic and nonacademic aspects of children’s lives.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the public strongly believes that schools are being asked to do too much. Two-thirds of the public say that, “we are asking schools to do too many things that really should be handled by parents at home.”<sup>23</sup> By a 2-to-1 majority, these polls also indicate that improving public schools is the most effective way to help children succeed.<sup>24</sup>

These divergent perspectives put schools in a seemingly no-win situation and beg the question: Who is responsible for creating the conditions for learning? Schools? Families? Communities? Our answer is that schools, families, and communities must work together to get the results that we all want for our nation’s children. By bringing together the assets and resources of communities and families at schools to help support students, while ensuring that the school sees the community as an important partner and resource, we can truly develop and nurture the whole child.

In the broader environment, a consensus is emerging that communities have a stake—and must play a role—in the development and success of all children.<sup>25</sup> The Public Education Network recently released a report about public hearings on the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind. A key recommendation was that schools need “full community support and collaboration in order to be successful.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, public opinion

suggests that a nurturing community is critical to young people's success.<sup>27</sup>

## **What Does it Take to Build and Foster These Conditions?**

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Educating the whole child requires the whole community. This means bringing the community into the school and having the school see the community as a resource. School–community relationships tend to run along a continuum, ranging from community bake sales and car washes to adopt-a-school programs to family–school–community partnerships to community schools. While approaches that offer pieces of community engagement can be helpful, too often they lack a cohesive strategy that focuses the activities of school and community partners on results for students, families, and communities.

**The community school represents the highest form of partnership; therefore we encourage the Commission to consider the community school as the vehicle to address the needs of the whole child.**

In community schools, educators do not operate on the assumption that the school has all the assets and expertise necessary to improve student learning. Instead, they collaborate with partners who demonstrate that they are committed to results that are important to the school system and the community. Schools are transformed into much more than just a portfolio of programs and services. They become a powerful agent for change in the lives of young people and their families and improve the climate of the entire school. Community schools are distinguished by

- Their use of evidenced-based programming and practice that cuts across a broad spectrum of approaches—from arts education to innovative literacy strategies, from health and social services to family support, from after-school enrichment to community-based learning, from parent education to parent and community leadership development.

- Their focus on results for students, families, and communities that cuts across multiple domains.
- Their use of lead agencies—including community-based organizations such as the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club, child and family services agencies, and institutions of higher education—that work in partnership with the school to mobilize and integrate community resources.
- Their use of community-based learning approaches, such as service learning and place-based education, that involve students learning in the real world.<sup>28</sup>
- The convergence of expertise, from both the school and the community, that enhances student learning and supports families and community.

Chicago is one of many cities that exemplify this approach. In Chicago, with 102 community schools, schools have “lead agencies,” such as the YMCA, Children’s Home and Aid Society, and the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, working with them, along with oversight committees where parents, schools, staff, and community members work collaboratively. This collaboration facilitates the development of the whole child by bringing together the expertise and resources of multiple organizations in one location. Supports and opportunities include after-school enrichment, parent leadership, physical and mental health services, dental care, family support centers, service learning, and adult education. Many other communities and schools, large and small, are approaching the development of the whole child in this way. Cincinnati, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; Kings Mountain, North Carolina; Lincoln, Nebraska; Long Beach, California; Portland, Oregon; and St. Paul, Virginia, are just a few of the places where this work is going on. Results are improving in all of these places. (For a more in-depth look at these communities and schools, see Appendix A).

We also know from our own research that community schools improve student learning. By addressing the needs of the whole child—physical, social, emotional, and academic—community schools create environments that fulfill all the necessary conditions for learning. In our report *Making the Difference*,<sup>29</sup> 15 of the 20 initiatives we looked at reported improvement in student academic achievement, as measured by improved grades in school courses and scores in proficiency testing. In addition, more than half of the evaluations looked for and found evidence of positive development as measured by a variety of indicators, including improved attendance, reduced behavior or discipline problems, greater compliance with school assignments and rules, increased access to physical and mental health services, greater contact with supportive adults, and improvements in personal/family situations. There were also improvements in family involvement and school functioning, as well as in the community.

## Conclusion

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We believe that the most effective way to frame the argument in support of the whole child and develop a campaign to mobilize public support for this issue is to argue that schools and communities must work together to create an environment in which all young people can succeed. The Commission has the opportunity to bring to the attention of policymakers and the public the community school as a truly comprehensive approach to educating the whole child.

As Educational Testing Service researcher Paul E. Barton wrote, “We tend to put considerations of family, community, and economy off-limits in education-reform policy discussions. However, we do so at our peril.”<sup>30</sup>

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## Appendix A: Schools and Community Descriptions

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### **Chicago, Illinois**

Chicago is one of many cities that exemplify this approach. In Chicago, one of the nation's largest school districts, the school district garners expertise from the public and private sectors, as well as the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago. These partners work together with schools to provide after-school programming, health and social services, Saturday and summer programs, adult education, and family support. The results are powerful—81 percent of community schools are showing improvement in academic achievement versus 74 percent of regular public schools. In addition, students participating in the initiative also had much greater access to after-school programming. The first cohort of 16 community schools in Chicago was able to offer over 525 programs for students and families. Today, because of the success of this initiative and the support of and confidence in the idea of community schools by the mayor and school district CEO, Chicago has been able to sustain the largest community schools initiative in the nation, with 102 out of a total of 613 schools operating as community schools and an average of 15,000 students and families being served each year.

### **Cincinnati, Ohio**

With strong leadership from the school board and the superintendent, the district, the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, Xavier University's Community Building Institute, and other community groups worked together to develop a community engagement process. Residents were asked what these new schools should look like and how they could be created as community-based learning centers. Across the city, residents in many neighborhoods offered valuable guidance and buy-in to this major community investment.

The first new school building opened in early 2005—complete with a school-based health center that serves the children in the school and residents in the surrounding community. Seven new buildings were scheduled to open in the 2005–06 school year. Each will provide on-site



space for a variety of community partners offering a range of services and supports.

The school district's community engagement process has fostered a range of community collaboratives in health, mental health, after-school programs, and the arts. These collaboratives are making it easier for resource coordinators to bring supports and opportunities to their schools and to meet the needs of students, families, and community residents.

### **Indianapolis, Indiana**

George Washington Community School in Indianapolis is also seeing positive results. The community school initiative has powerful support from the neighborhood and has successfully brought the community even closer together through on-site neighborhood meetings. Long before becoming a community school, George Washington had been closed by the district. In 2000, due to the intensity of community support, the school was reopened as a community school. Today, working closely with community groups, the school collaborates with 49 local organizations to ensure that community needs are met on site. This collaboration includes mental and physical health consultation, day care, after-school programs, college prep classes, and adult education programs. Nearly six years after reopening as a community school, standardized test scores have risen every year by an average of 10 to 15 percentage points and sophomores, tested for the first time in 2003, outscored those in all of Indianapolis's traditional high schools.

### **Kings Mountain, North Carolina**

Kings Mountain faces many of the same challenges as other rural communities in the state—working poor families, single mothers, few college-educated parents, and a high unemployment rate. The poverty and instability in the community affected the school district and caused frustration for many parents and teachers. In response, the Kings Mountain School District launched a partnership with Communities in Schools (CIS) in 1992. Over the past decade, this partnership, which focuses on children across developmental domains, has helped turn East Elementary School

in Kings Mountain from a low-performing, under-resourced school into a state-recognized School of Excellence.

### **Lincoln, Nebraska**

An array of community-based service agencies with expertise and experience in providing educational and recreational programs, physical and behavioral health services, housing referrals, and prevention programs all contribute to the achievement of positive outcomes for children, families, and neighborhood residents. In many schools, programs offered include adult literacy and GED classes, homeowner education, and financial fitness classes. Health, dental, and vision partnerships respond to many children's basic physical health needs. A leadership council with representation from across the community guides the effort.

### **Long Beach, California**

In Long Beach, Stevenson-YMCA Community School works with community-based organizations and parents to develop students' social, emotional, physical, moral, and academic competencies. The YMCA acts as a lead partner, providing resources and space and hiring a community school coordinator. Community and student leadership institutes, after-school enrichment, and adult education classes, many led by residents, are at the heart of the community school. Mental health services are available on site, and the school has a close relationship with a nearby community health center, which provide medical services. The principal, Gonzalo Moraga, is convinced that the school must pay attention to the whole child in order to help students succeed academically. And the results bear out this belief—Stevenson not only is meeting Adequate Yearly Progress but also has been voted a California Distinguished School, a distinction reserved for the state's most exemplary and inspiring public schools.

### **Portland/Multnomah County, Oregon**

The SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods) Community Schools Initiative emerged from a 1998 decision by Multnomah County and the City of Portland to partner with the aim of improving schools. County and city

leaders, in collaboration with school districts and local nonprofits, created a model bringing together existing programs such as Portland Parks and Recreation's school-based recreation and enrichment programs and the county's school-based programs in health, mental health, and family support. The initiative increased the impact of these resources by organizing them to better integrate education with social services and youth development programs and to increase the involvement of families, community members, and local businesses. There are now 56 SUN community schools in a county with 150 schools in 8 different school districts.

### **St. Paul, Virginia**

St. Paul is a rural Appalachian town of 1,000 people. Education at St. Paul integrates the environment into the curriculum, uses community development strategies, and engages parents and other community residents. There is a sense at St. Paul that everyone is connected, though this wasn't always the case. Several years ago, veteran principal Jim Short noticed that some students who did not participate in athletics or clubs often felt isolated. He decided that community-based service and project-based learning were ways to help such students develop a sense of belonging to the school and community while also improving the community's perception of young people.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>3</sup> Benard, B. (1991). *Fostering resiliency in kids: Protective factors in the family, school, and community*. Portland, OR: Western Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities. [Retrieved from the ERIC database (ERIC # ED 335 781).]; McLaughlin, M. (2000). *Community counts: How youth organizations matter for youth development*. Washington, DC: Public Education Network.

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<sup>12</sup> McLaughlin, *Community counts*.

<sup>13</sup> Blank, M., Berg, A., & Melaville, A. (2006). *Community-based learning*. Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools.

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<sup>16</sup> America's Promise: The Alliance For Youth. (n.d.). America's Promise: Why We're Here [About Us]. Retrieved June 23, 2006, from <http://www.americaspromise.org/whyhere/5promises.cfm>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *The public speaks out on No Child Left Behind.* (2006). Washington, DC: Public Education Network.

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<sup>27</sup> Keep Arts in Schools. *Fulfilling the Promise of No Child Left Behind.*

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