



ASCD 2016 | Conditions for Learning

A foundation of systemic support—across families, schools, and communities—is necessary for students to achieve and thrive. Now, more than ever, the development and growth of the whole child must be systemically promoted through a variety of educational conditions and supports.

To ensure all children have the supports necessary for classroom engagement and school success, they must have access to nurturing environments, both in and out of school. Student mental and physical health are essential for school engagement and achievement. Schools must provide not only instruction in social and emotional learning but also integrated services and programs that build students' capacity for academic achievement and lifelong success. In addition, addressing children's mental health needs contributes to better attendance, behavior, and overall student achievement. Schools, communities, and health care providers must collaborate to create a system of supports, services, and programs that address the comprehensive health needs of all students and their families.

Individual and creative approaches to teaching and learning ensure that all students have the opportunity to meet their maximum potential. Instruction must be designed to promote each student's individual growth, to recognize and nurture individual strengths, and to provide opportunities to attain the comprehensive knowledge and skills necessary for life beyond high school. When educators and fellow students embrace each child's unique cultural background and individual characteristics, they can leverage these differences as a way to bring value to classroom learning. Finally, to ensure schools maintain a climate that supports teaching and learning, children's behavioral challenges should be addressed through supportive rather than punitive educational interventions.

Community- and school-based extended learning opportunities provide all students, particularly disadvantaged ones, with further opportunities for engagement and academic enrichment. Participation in extended learning opportunities—both in and outside of school—help narrow achievement gaps, improve academic and behavioral outcomes, and reduce school absences. Such opportunities encourage participation in many programs—such as civics, the arts, and physical activities—that help build cooperative and collaborative skills. Schools can partner with parents and community groups to provide these opportunities to enhance student well-being, engagement, and academic success.

Schools should provide access to transitional supports to prepare students for postsecondary pursuits. Students graduating from high school face many challenges in the transition to adulthood, whether they are college bound or heading into the workforce. They need guidance and support to make this milestone transition toward greater independence and autonomy. Such supports should be built into the high school experience, and educators should receive special instruction and training to help aspiring students achieve their goals.

Federal and state governments play a crucial role in supporting student success. Funding and collaboration are two essential components for school, educator, and student success. Policymakers must address existing funding, resource, and opportunity inequities across states, districts, and communities to help mitigate the effects of poverty in our schools and families and ensure all students meet college- and career-readiness expectations. And they can maximize the limited availability of school and community resources by encouraging agencies to collaborate and align programs.