Educating the Whole Child in the Time of COVID-19

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"The whole child is growing up – be prepared to see more, read more, and do more for the whole child."

-Sean Slade, Senior Director of Global Outreach at ASCD

The impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent school closures have taken a toll on education. School districts made the necessary switch to virtual learning, but at what cost to students? These words by Sean Slade make one take pause and question what more can be done during this time of uncertainty to reach and teach students? What does it mean to educate the whole child? And if indeed the whole child is growing up, implying a loss of time, how can educators prepare to do more for the whole child? It is easy for anyone to lose the way in this time of crisis as school districts navigate the best plans and approaches for the reopening of schools and for engaging and teaching students. There continue to be so many shifts in responses to the disruption that COVID-19 has had on schools that it can quickly become overwhelming. ("The Coronavirus Spring: The Historic Closing of U.S. Schools (A Timeline)," 2020) As school and campus leaders demonstrate good leadership by being responsive to the needs of the campus, the question remains; how can schools better address the education of young people in more holistic and equitable ways? The purpose has not changed only the how has changed, and it is the response that will make all the difference. Back to school will not be a return to business as usual; the call then is for schools to prepare in connecting with and responding to the needs of the whole child.

Literature Review on At Risk Students

Educators have long known that traditional teaching methods have been ineffective for engaging students identified as at risk. Still, it has been almost impossible to get change before this crisis came along. The Glossary of Education Reform describes students who are At Risk as those:

"students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school. The term may be applied to students who face circumstances that could jeopardize their ability to complete school, such as homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, serious health issues, domestic violence, transiency (as in the case of migrant-worker families), or other conditions, or it may refer to learning disabilities, low test scores, disciplinary problems, grade retentions, or other learning-related factors that could adversely affect the educational performance and attainment of some students." (www.edglossary.org/atrisk, 2013)

The demographic of students who are identified at Risk are often children of color.

Closing the academic achievement gap for students at Risk has been an ongoing struggle for schools for years. (Using Research Evidence to Strengthen Support for At-Risk Students, 2020)

The No Child Left Behind Act was adopted in 2001which introduced accountability, and its purpose was to close the achievement gaps for students who were documented as underperforming. It assumed that schools were not seriously taking on the responsibility to educate Hispanic, African American, and low-income students. (National Education Association, 2020) Going Back to a Better School).

These disparities have long existed as a neighborhood issue where these neighborhood schools are also segregated. Schools with populations of children affected by severe socioeconomic problems devote less time and attention to academic instruction. So when the decision to close schools and to move to distance learning as a response to the pandemic, it became quickly evident that these communities were struggling to make this shift and to fully support students' online engagement and academic learning and progress. These same

communities have also struggled with ongoing inequities in health care, education, economic stability, trauma, and housing, which we know have persisted for years. These challenges became all the more evident as students and families struggled all the more by having to deal with factors of health outcomes, loss of employment, food insecurity, and lack of internet access, which contributed to disengagement from school as the overwhelming need for survival took precedence. (Adverse consequences of school closures, 2020; "Using Research Evidence to Strengthen Support for At-Risk Students," 2020) Dr. Alisa Leckie, who has worked with at risk youth since the beginning of her career and who currently serves as the Co-Chair of the National Youth at Risk Conference, says at risk youth across the country are struggling. "Not all of our students live in ideal home situations. There are some stress and anxiety from being at home. Coming back to schools after an extended period is just going to increase some of those stresses and anxiety issues of our students." (Bolden, 2020)

Literature Review for Responsive Schools

As school leaders look ahead to the next school year, it is easy to become overwhelmed. In order to reach and teach all students, educators can start to reframe the problems to begin to look for opportunities to engage students. Part of this work is to understand the obstacles and disparities that persist. We can then pull together ways to make our current educational system work equitably to help all students. This is a unique opportunity to develop a more responsive approach to teach the whole child and to create a system of equity for all. (Christakis, E. 2020)

According to Yoram Wind, emeritus professor of marketing at the Wharton University of Pennsylvania, he offers this suggestion in the time of crisis, "Change the mental model: Instead of viewing the present situation as a short-term necessary evil that we should try to leave behind as soon as possible and return to a comfortable pre-crisis past, we should ask how to use the

current situation to speed up long overdue changes." (Wind, 2020 Ten Guidelines for Creating Opportunities in a Time of Crisis).

In looking at how schools have responded positively to meet the needs of all students during the shutdown they have found creative ways to reach out in supportive ways to students and families not only in making the transition to remote learning but also by providing breakfast and lunch for drive by a pickup, offering curbside pickup and delivery of assignment packets, textbooks, and devices, home visits (in protective gear), providing wi-fi hubs for connectivity, teachers conducted Zoom check-ins as well as course content and lesson delivery, counselors followed up with individual phone calls and Zoom meetings to support for student well-being, school nurses also conducted limited wellness checks via Zoom. Campuses even provided food boxes to families. ("Coronavirus opens doors to rethinking innovation in schools," 2020)

Looking ahead, then to this Fall, administrators, teachers, and staff must plan to not only prioritize student learning but student well-being as well (e.g., their safety, sense of community, and social and emotional well-being) more than they have done in the past. While equality means treating every student the same, equity means making sure every student has the support they need to be successful. (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles, 2015) As families decide to make the difficult decision to send their kids back to school for in-person learning or to keep them home for e-learning, principals and administrators will need to anticipate the need for more family engagement, connection, communication, and by addressing ongoing student learning support in reference to student learning needs. (Poth, 2020) When they return to school, educators want every student to feel welcomed, seen, accepted, and supported. Our students have experienced unprecedented changes in their daily routines and communities. We, as educators, will need to take time for reflection—to consider our unconscious biases and how they shape our

words. Students pick up on subtle messages in what we say and do not say to them. And how we talk about our students with colleagues is just as important. ("Our Words Matter |", 2020)

Principals must also recognize the need to support their teachers as they face this new challenge with agility, innovation, resilience, and a greater sense of compassion as an opportunity to develop digital learning that students will respond to. While so many school districts and individual campuses very quickly transitioned to online education to finish the school year, educators say that there were benefits to this new learning platform as well as challenges once the novelty of the unique situation wore off. Teachers did their best to learn and develop online lessons, but it became evident that they needed more training and opportunities to work collaboratively. (Gewertz, 2020)

Schools are now making plans to make e-learning part of their 'new normal' after experiencing some benefits first-hand. With virtual and digital learning replacing physical classrooms or working in conjunction with a hybrid model, teacher flexibility and willingness to adapt must be recognized and supported as teachers take risks in changing their approach and delivery to develop skills such as critical thinking and adaptability. The aim is no longer adequate education but rather a more productive sense of excellence to create new and effective methods of educating students for success in the future. The need then for professional development, training, and support becomes that much more focused and vital. This is the work that lies ahead of us. ("How to Plan for the Next School Year and New Normal," 2020)

Literature Review on Teaching the Whole Child

According to education researcher Maria del Carmen Salazar, overuse of such things as scripted and mandated instructional curricula can hinder educators and students from developing

meaningful relationships, and this approach contradicts so much of what we know from whole-child education research. "For a nation that claims to place a priority on leaving no child behind, the United States has allowed a tragic paradox to evolve over the last several decades. On the one hand, the neurobiological, behavioral, and social sciences have seen an explosion of research on children's development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). These scientific advances have dramatically increased our capacity to intervene and support highly vulnerable children." (Scherer, 2009, P.95)

Currently, our education system often focuses on a narrow view of a child's cognitive development with an emphasis on teaching content knowledge, often to be memorized and repeated in the same form it was received in math, science, and reading and then later testing those skills. Such a narrow focus does not match the ways that children need to grow and learn in their relationships, identity, emotional understanding, and overall well-being. Recent research in neuroscience, developmental and learning sciences, education, sociology, and many other fields confirms that a "whole child" approach is not only desirable but necessary to ensure that children learn well. ("Four Ways Schools Can Support the Whole Child," 2020)

As educators continually look for ways to improve instruction to meet the needs of all students, teachers must also acknowledge the many ways in which students differ from one another (class, gender, ethnicity, family background, language, abilities, size, religion, and so on); and value this diversity, and design and implement productive, sensitive responses. (Scherer. 2009)

Literature Review on Supporting Teachers through Professional Learning Communities

School leadership must also recognize the need to support teachers while teachers are supporting students. No one does this work in isolation. Is where the work of Professional Learning Communities helps teachers. A PLC is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. PLCs shift the conversation from teaching to learning. Teachers in a PLC support each other to continuously question the status quo, as they seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the processes, and then reflect on the results. (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, 2010) PLCs will become more critical than ever as they will play a vital role in how teachers approach hybrid digital learning to engage students in their learning. In the words of Simon Sinek, "A team is not a group of people that work together. A team is a group of people that trust each other." (Sinek, 2020, About Learning Your 'Why').

Not only are PLCs a place to co-plan and discuss issues happening in the grade level or content area, but PLCs will also become an important place to design in-person lessons and digital lessons and learning experiences as well. In supporting the work of PLCs in this current climate, we must acknowledge that the trauma and loss are real and then engage in the work to get past the trauma that the pandemic has caused to our students and our teaching. We must be willing to reframe this current situation with optimism so that we can look at the ways this whole experience will enhance what we do and how we do this coming school year. PLCs then support these conversations in a climate of trust. (Leane, 2018)

The PLC questions take on even greater importance as we look ahead to shifting our understanding of the work ahead;

- 1. What do we want students to learn? (essential standards)
- 2. How will we know if they have learned? (team-developed common assessments)

- 3. What will we do if they don't learn? (systematic interventions)
- 4. What will we do if they already know it? (extended learning)

Everyone can still be creative in their way, but PLCs will need to be the venue teachers use to gather evidence about what is working in both in-person classrooms and remote learning experiences. As schools take this opportunity to reimagine current practices, PLCs will be vital to making sure that instruction is tighter and that each grade and content area is developing equitable ways to engage all students as well as to ensure that students do not drop off our radar. (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, 2010)

The SMART goals:

SMART is an acronym that stands for Strategic/Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Timely. Therefore, a SMART goal incorporates all these criteria to help focus efforts and increase the chances of achieving the set upon goal. The alignment of SMART goals allows teachers in PLC to focus on data more closely associated with their daily work, resulting in immediate feedback for students. The PLC teams will remain focused on this continuous process of improvement.

Implementing the Whole Child Approach Using the PLC Framework at St. John Berchmans Catholic School

As previously discussed, the value of implementing a PLC structure (action plan) and calendar will significantly serve our teachers and, in turn, our students as we focus time, effort, and collaboration to truly support high levels of learning for all by addressing the whole child. As we examine our mission and vision statements will reflect this new understanding, we will commit to the PLC process for our campus. The adults in the school need to talk about how

students are learning and what and how teachers are teaching. Productive professional learning communities provide opportunities for adults to learn and think together.

Mission Statement:

St. John Berchmans Catholic School enables the students to reach full awareness of their God given talents by buildings self-confidence, moral, civic, and spiritual values in a safe, secure, positive learning environment.

Vision:

St. John Berchmans School believes in a holistic education that enables all students to discover themselves, their strengths, and weakness. Through methods of role modeling, teachers strive to build student's self-esteem, self-determination, self- discipline, and responsibility in an atmosphere of optimism and love.

SJB Professional Learning Community Action Plan for Teaching the Whole Child

School Improvement Goal Correlated to PLC Focus:

Teaching the whole child; Creating a positive school climate based on strong relationships that support student learning and engagement.

Data/Information Used to Determine PLC Action Plan Goals:

We will analyze student data; attendance, grades, NWEA data (BOY, MOY, EOY) engagement/participation, parent/student surveys; implementing a whole child approach through collaboration, coordination, and integration to ensure long term success.

Foster a supportive environment that promotes strong relationships among staff, students, and families Goal 2: Opportunities for staff collaboration and leadership that strengthen trust among educators. Administrator, lead teachers, faculty and staff P.I. the current of t	LC norms, aining, D. Teaching to be whole child curriculum: Feaching the Vhole Child chatructional cractices That cupport Social-motional Learning character tracker valuation crameworks) taff Retreat	August 3-7, 2020 Teacher In-service Days Weekly PLC schedule; Teams will develop norms, agendas, for discussions and keep reflective notes after each PLC meeting (Zoom live conferences or meeting

Suggested PLC weekly Calendar: allows for vertical and horizontal team collaboration

1. August: 17- 21	Day: MonFri.	Time:
PLC w/administration/1st day of school	8/17/2020 -PLC library	8-15-9:45 AM
Grade level team meeting	08/18/20	8-15-9:45 AM
Content PLCs /collaboration	08/19/20	8-15-9:45 AM
PLC / Teacher Driven/ELA – best practices	8/20/2020 -PLC library	8-15-9:45 AM
Content PLCs/collaboration / RTI	08/21/20	8:15-9:45 AM

PLC; Teaching to the Whole Child Action Steps:

Date	Action	People
August	 Professional Development 1st Day of School SMART Goal PLC meets weekly to plan instructional strategies and plan formative assessments used to achieve student learning by Teaching the whole child; Creating a positive school climate based on strong relationships that support 	School Administrators, Teachers & staff Grade level PLCs
September	 Staff Development; Teaching the Whole Child) Formative assessment PLC meets to review formative data, observations, assessments used to measure student learning and progress. 	School Administrators, Teachers & staff Grade level PLCs
	• Student data; attendance, grades, NWEA data (BOY) engagement/participation, parent/student surveys; implementing a whole child approach through collaboration, coordination, and integration to ensure long term success; identify needs/support.	
October	 Communicate with parents/share data RTI process for identified students Staff Development PLC meets weekly to plan instructional strategies, plan formative assessments used to target support for specific students in need. 	School Administrators, Teachers & staff Grade level PLCs
November	 Communicate with parents Formative Assessment Continued RTI / progress 	School Administrators, Teachers & staff

	 PLC meets weekly to plan instructional strategies, plan formative assessments used to achieve student learning, and analyze data from assessments. Are students responding and progressing? 	Grade level PLCs
December	 Formative Assessment NWEA data (MOY) PLC meets weekly to plan instructional strategies, plan formative assessments used to achieve student learning, and analyze data from assessments. 	School Administrators, Teachers & staff Grade level PLCs
January	 Communicate with parents/share data Teacher Workday 	School Administrators, Teachers & staff
February	 RTI Staff Development Formative Assessment PLC meets weekly to plan instructional strategies, plan formative assessments used to achieve student learning, and analyze data from assessments. 	School Administrators, Teachers & staff Grade level PLCs
March	 Communicate with parents/share data Benchmark RTI Interventions PLC meets weekly to plan instructional strategies, plan formative assessments used to achieve student learning, and analyze data from assessments. 	School Administrators, Teachers & staff Grade level PLCs
April	 Formative Assessment NWEA data (EOY) PLC meets weekly to plan instructional strategies, plan formative assessments used to 	School Administrators, Teachers & staff

	achieve student learning, and analyze data from assessments.Communicate with parents/share data	Grade level PLCs
May	 Formative Assessment PLC meets weekly to plan instructional strategies, plan formative assessments used to achieve student learning, and analyze data from assessments. 	School Administrators, Teachers & staff Grade level PLCs
June	PLC meets to see if the campus achieved SMART Goal /analysis/review.	School Administrators, Teachers & staff Grade level PLCs

The SJB framework and expectations for implementing PLCs that support the whole child goals are as follows:

PLCs will meet daily according to the outlined PLC calendar. This PLC calendar will allow for vertical and horizontal alignment as a campus as well as allow for ongoing professional learning that incorporates the whole child to support healthy learning and growing.

- PLCs will meet once a week with the school administrator to review data and trends to analyze approaches and responses to teaching to the whole child.
- PLCs will meet on designated days that will allow for teams to meet by content areas and
 by grade levels. They will assess data about student progress and look for patterns of
 student need or struggle by viewing the child as a whole (i.e., How are we helping kids
 learn to be self-aware, advocate for themselves, manage their behaviors?).

- Teacher driven PLCs will meet weekly to allow for teachers to present best practices,
 learning from training/professional development/book studies, etc. to the whole staff.
- PLC teams will appoint facilitators to develop agendas, gather data, facilitate discussions,
 and keep documentation notes to submit to administration.

This approach to teaching with the whole child in mind will take time to implement and support. The campus leadership must give time, support, and training to faculty and staff. A possible curriculum to assist in this undertaking is <u>Teaching the Whole Child Instructional</u>

Practices: Three Teacher Evaluation Frameworks, (Revised Edition JANUARY 2014 Nicholas Yoder, Ph.D.)(2020)

Building a community of learners begins with an effective PLC structure where the adults come together to learn, discuss, analyze, collaborate, and plan for the implementation of this whole child approach to education by giving focus to healthy development, student learning, and academic achievement. As we approach our work in this manner, we can begin to recognize and then address our student's needs, all while genuinely living up to SJB's mission statement.

Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted so much of what we used to take for granted, especially in education. The mandate for school closures is certainly understandable in light of this current health crisis, but at what cost? Schools were able to make the transition to online or virtual learning rather quickly, and it worked, for the most part, to close out the school year. After reflecting on these school closures, we realize that we have had to re-evaluate our expectations of our students and their families. As we worked remotely with students, it quickly became evident that students were struggling with so much insecurity and needed at home. We

recognized in this the need for students to take care of family needs and their well-being first and that academics and instruction were second. Without the structure and routine that school provides, students had difficulty making the transition to learning from home, and they may not have had the support that they needed. It became evident that educators had to respond differently and with sensitivity to students' struggles to find ways to get them what they needed, keep them fed, providing technology and devices, etc. In short, we got to see our students differently; we saw the whole child.

As we prepare to return to school this Fall, we have a renewed understanding of how we will need to work with our students' overall well-being so that we can intervene quickly to connect with our students. Nothing is more important than keeping at-risk students stable and engaged. We can afford to do no less. As schools expand their view of students as whole individuals, it is our responsibility to connect with all students. Teachers need to adopt different methods of teaching, allowing for more flexibility and one on one instruction. By providing teachers with the training, structure, and support that they need to develop supportive and responsive education, they will be better able to approach learning as social and emotional, as well as academic.

"Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all."

-Aristotle

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