2.2 Achieving Equity:
A "Whole Child" Approach to Strategy

Best Strategies Address the Whole Child

Meeting your school community's needs will require a holistic approach that includes investment in programming that extends student support systems beyond academic performance and recognizes the learning impact of a student's physical and mental health, home environment, and community.

What is the Whole Child?

This "whole child" approach[1] requires increased alignment of services to meet student needs, and support for educators and community partners to prioritize engaged learning. ESSA gives SEAs and LEAs flexibility to address the comprehensive needs of students via diversifying accountability plans to include indicators of school quality; increasing professional development opportunities; and increasing the number of school employed mental health professionals. Such strategies work to not only support students academically through programs like tutoring, but to meet other health and psychosocial development needs through engagement of families and partnerships with outside organizations, such as food banks, health care providers, institutes of higher learning, youth development organizations, and employment support agencies.[2] Each of the outlined strategies for improving student academic success should be considered part of a whole child approach and can include community partnership to build capacity (e.g. financial, staffing) for greater impact.

ESSA Support

ESSA recognizes a whole child approach to education in a number of ways, including funding for direct non-academic services, counseling and community schools (e.g. Title I, Title IV 21st CCLC), and broad flexibility for support and improvement strategies to potentially include non-academic supports. Examples of whole child strategies or programs include promoting civic engagement within the community, social-emotional learning, inclusive or positive behavioral supports, expanded learning opportunities, and addressing mental and physical wellness (including counseling, trauma-informed care, and substance abuse treatment).

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1 Whole child approaches might also be referred to as community school strategies, integrated student supports, wrap-around services, or school-linked services.
2. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-cardinali/the-experts-have-spoken-i_b_4842549.html

Success of the Whole Child Approach

Statistics have shown that whole child supports have a far reach. In a 2014 report, whole child approaches — such as integrated support services and community schools — were estimated to reach 1.5 million students in 3,000 schools.

Learn more at the Whole Child Approach. teams, and charter management.

Once you and your community have determined your priorities, choose from the following pages which strategies could be most helpful to your school improvement efforts.

Promoting Equity

These school improvement strategies should be implemented in a targeted way. It may be the case that all of your students require the same interventions, but it is more likely that different students, staff, and families require differentiated support. Choose from the following school improvement strategies considering this approach.

Ask the Experts: School Improvement

✓ Best Practices for School Improvement Planning (Hanover Research)
✓ Five Strategies for Creating a High-Growth School (Battelle for Kids; SOAR Learning and Leading Collaborative)
✓ Implementing Change: Rethinking School Improvement Strategies and Funding Under ESSA (Chiefs for Change)

Highlighted Resources
Additional Strategies

These program strategies are not the only ones that work. We recommend you take a look at resources to support the students and school community you serve, like:

- AASA's Leveling the Playing Field for Rural Students,

- the Lexington Institute's Better Serving Those Who Serve: Improving the Educational Opportunities of Military-Connected Students,

- the National Black Child Development Institute's Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: A Strengths-Based Look at the State of the Black Child, or

- the Rural Schools Collaborative's website at ruralschoolscollaborative.org/stories for examples of rural schools and districts engaging with their communities to support kids

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