

From Commitment to Action: Creating Healthy and Equitable Schools



School leaders know that health and academic achievement are deeply connected and interdependent. Using an **equity framework** to consider each child holistically can help support student success. In equitable schools, school leaders ensure that students receive what they need to develop to their full potential. School leaders are called upon to be creative and are asked to use an equity framework to make it possible for students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, cultures

and languages, religion, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, ages, and socioeconomic statuses to be healthy, to learn, and to thrive. The **Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model** provides an approach to learning and health that considers the needs of all children as the central focus of education.¹

How can we promote an equitable and healthy school through WSCC?²

Mind the gap

- Use data to identify gaps in achievement or other outcomes. Use tools such as the [School Health Index](#).
- Assess the needs and assets of students, families, staff, schools, and community using surveys, focus groups, and interviews.
- Bridge the gap. Develop plans to address the needs of students, families, staff, schools, and community.

Consider: How do you define student success? How are your data on sub-populations used in decision making? Where are the gaps and how can you address them?

Think access and inclusion

- Remove system barriers to student success such as discriminatory testing requirements, grading policies, or disciplinary measures.
- Facilitate equity trainings for your school health team to provide members with strategies on how to challenge and change institutionalized inequities.
- Prioritize the voices of those most impacted by inequities by focusing initiatives in your strategic plans around the needs of those individuals.

Consider: Who is trying to be involved or heard but cannot? Are there systems in place to monitor and revise policies and practices that limit access and inclusion?

Build and sustain accountable systems

- Create a shared definition of equity within your school or district.
- Set goals that prioritize the needs of students — including those with marginalized identities.
- Revise policies and practices that contribute to health disparities and achievement gaps.

Consider: How is school leadership responding to the complex needs of all students? How does your school include [youth voice](#) in strategic planning processes?

Success story: When a High School Makes Equity a Priority

Milwaukie High School (MHS) in Oregon has addressed the needs of a diverse student body and created a strong social and emotional school climate by:

- Building a school-based health center to address access to health and social services.
- Considering students' self-described needs when hiring new faculty and staff. Recently, when hiring a new baseball coach, the school administration had students interview the candidates and considered their feedback in making the selection.
- Providing a platform for students to create, present, and implement recommendations to improve policies that impact student success. Recently, students worked with staff to revise some of their school's grading policies.

Success story: When a District Distributes Resources Equitably

Patchogue-Medford Schools in New York prioritized equity in programs, staff, budget, and opportunities to address the unmet needs of students. The district redistributed resources and earmarked a portion of its state aid allocation for family centers in schools throughout the district.

These family centers support families so that students can focus on learning. Some of the services and supports that the centers provide include:

- Health services such as screenings, dental services, and substance abuse and crisis intervention assistance.
- Support for basic needs such as food and clothing or utility bills.
- Connections with service providers through bilingual parent workshops.

Distribute resources equitably

- Redistribute resources to meet the needs of students. Resources could include staff experience and qualifications; funding; buildings and environment; support services; and out-of-school-time opportunities.
- Include students, families, and community in decision making about budgeting and resources.
- Collaborate with community partners who have the resources and capacity needed to support students and schools.

Consider: Who is typically invited to contribute to conversations about how your district/school spends money? Whose expertise is regarded as valuable to these conversations and processes?

Build a positive climate for all

- Cultivate positive, supportive relationships with students, families, and community.
- Integrate social and emotional learning curriculum into classroom and staff professional development.
- Establish school and classroom rules and appropriate consequences collaboratively with students.
- Nurture a sense of respect, acceptance, value, support, cultural humility, safety, and security for and among students, parents, community, and staff.

Consider: How can you address implicit bias that exists within your school/district? How can you set a positive tone, be inclusive, and build momentum for student success?

Focus on success for all

- Create challenging learning opportunities and expect academic excellence from each student.
- Provide wraparound supports such as counseling, psychological and social services, health services, or supplemental academic programs.
- Develop trauma-informed school practices and services. Create necessary support for students who have suffered trauma and other adverse childhood experiences.

Consider: Are students getting what they need to succeed and thrive?

Where can I learn more about school health equity?

- [Virtual Healthy School Resource List by WSCC Components](#)
- [The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model: A Guide to Implementation](#)
- [Six Goals of Educational Equity and School Reform](#)
- [What Is Health Equity and Racial Justice, and How Do We Achieve It?](#)
- [Creating the Healthiest Nation: Health and Educational Equity](#)
- [Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity](#)
- [Community Schools: Promoting Student Success: A Rationale and Results Framework](#)
- [The Six Pillars of Community Schools Toolkit: NEA Resource Guide for Educators, Families & Communities](#)

References:

- (1) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). The whole school, whole community, whole child model [PDF File]. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/wsc/pdf/wsc_fact_sheet_508c.pdf
- (2) Scott, B. (2006). Six goals of educational equity and school reform [PDF File]. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/2011progdirmtg/equityscale.pdf>

This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number NU38OT000315, funded by the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health, School Health Branch, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.