

Educating the Whole Child:  
The New Learning Compact

# Community Conversations for High School Students

A Facilitator's Guide for Student Discussion Groups

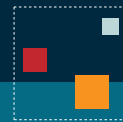


**ASCD**<sup>®</sup>

## Before You Begin



### A Brief Overview of the Whole Child



Today, educational practice and policy focus overwhelmingly on academic achievement. This achievement, however, is but one element of student learning and development and only a part of any complete system of educational accountability. Communities, schools, and teachers must all support the development of a child who is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

Educating the Whole Child: The New Learning Compact is an initiative by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) that advocates a comprehensive approach to learning and teaching. We recognize successful young people must be not only knowledgeable when they graduate from school, but also emotionally and physically healthy, civically engaged, responsible, and caring. We believe every child deserves a 21st century education that fully prepares him or her for college, work, and citizenship.

ASCD has developed a new Whole Child Compact that identifies the major components of the whole child initiative:

- Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
- Each student learns in an intellectually challenging environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.
- Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
- Each student has access to personalized learning and to qualified, caring adults.
- Each graduate is prepared for success in college or further study and for employment in a global environment.

From this compact, we've prepared a five-point action agenda (see p. 11) that elaborates on the initiative and provides a framework around which we can focus our efforts.

## Recognizing the Importance of Student Voices

Students are experts in school reform; they understand their peers and have the intuition to identify the methods of teaching that are most effective and valuable to their education. When students, along with adult stakeholders, are given a meaningful voice in shaping the environment of the school, they develop a shared investment in shaping the school identity. If you want them to rise to the occasion and respond sensibly and maturely, you must treat students with respect and as valued members of the community. Keep in mind that this is high school, where feelings of apathy can be overwhelming. When given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, however, students experience a sense of connectedness, which leads to positive results for the school community and for the students themselves. This engagement encourages students to take an active role in schoolwide reform initiatives and to claim ownership over their education.

ASCD has launched the Whole Child Community Conversations Project to allow students to explore and discuss the concept of the whole child, discovering in the process how to work together to support the whole child initiative. This guide will help you prepare for and lead a student discussion to inspire conversation and answer the following questions:

- What does educating the whole child mean to students?
- What do students understand about the initiative, and what is still unclear?
- What are the students' reactions to this initiative?
- What is the students' role in this initiative?

## What Does This Mean for Students?

How does this new compact change the fundamental values and structure of students' education? And more important, how can students provide insight, input, and action to this initiative? We are working to create a world where every student has the skills necessary to not only survive but also thrive in our contemporary, global society. So what does this 21st century education entail, and how does it change how students view learning?

Consider the following facts: young people are growing up in a power information age, where data bombards them at lightning speed. They receive more information by reading the front page of *The New York Times* than a person living in the 19th century would obtain in his or her entire lifetime. But schools still adhere to the same basic structure; as everything around us constantly changes, schools remain the same. "Educating the whole child" means reacting to this evolving society and nurturing all students accordingly, while maintaining a structure to ensure accountability.



## The Qualities of a Whole Child

- Intellectually active
- Physically, verbally, socially, and academically competent
- Empathetic, kind, caring, and fair
- Creative and curious
- Disciplined, self-directed, and goal oriented
- Free
- Critical thinker
- Confident
- Cared for and valued

Reflect on the qualities of a whole child and consider the following questions:

- Do your school and community support these traits within students?
- In what ways can your school further foster these qualities?
- How can schools help students achieve these ends?
- How can students help schools achieve these ends?

## Preparing for a Successful Small-Group Conversation

Small-group discussions allow participants to weigh in on issues important to them. Done well, the process can result in a common vision and shared responsibility for an issue. This concept of shared responsibility is vital for students to become invested in their education.

The following are some best practices to consider when designing small-group conversations about educating the whole child:

- Invite new ideas and a spirited give-and-take on issues focusing on the whole child approach to learning. Do not squelch negativity; use that energy to provoke deeper thoughts and new ideas.
- Feel free to expand the size of the group based on interest and commitment; if additional participants are willing and enthusiastic, let them contribute to the conversation.
- Share your results and feedback with ASCD and local decision makers, such as an advisor, administrator, or school committee. Your ideas will help create a better educational experience for participants.
- Be inclusive when recruiting participants. Be in tune with the various cliques to ensure diversity. By actively recruiting students who reflect the school's diversity in ethnicity, culture, perspectives, gender, and age, you'll achieve a richer dialogue from a more representative sample.

## Recruit Participants

This discussion should include participants that represent the entire school. Some tips for recruitment:

- Strive for a diversity in opinion, ethnicity, race, gender, and grade that reflects the makeup of the student body.
- Avoid inviting just the “usual suspects” (e.g., student body president, student governance expert). Keep these people involved, but encourage them to reach out and attract a larger, more representative group of students.
- Try to involve students just starting their high school careers; these

younger students will experience the effects of school change and therefore will have an invested interest in the structure of the school. Additionally, this will bring consistency and continuity to the movement.

- Make personal contact to ensure that students realize that their voice is necessary and important.
- Explain how their input will help and why they are valued.



## Traits of a Good Facilitator

The term “facilitator” comes from the Latin word *facilis*, meaning “easy.” A facilitator’s job, therefore, is to make this discussion as simple as possible, creating an atmosphere that is conducive to active participation. Keep the following qualities in mind as you begin:

- Enter the discussion informed, with a strong command over the material.
- Establish and ensure a safe environment.
- Provide the group with ground rules and guidelines before commencing conversation.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for participation from all members.
- Listen, paraphrase, and reflect upon points made to ensure clarity.
- Keep the group focused and on track.
- Maintain neutrality.
- Remind the group of objectives throughout the session.
- Observe and respond objectively.
- Intervene when appropriate and necessary without dominating conversation.
- Support the ideas of others through empathy and positive reinforcement.

If you are unsure of your ability to properly perform these tasks, consider collaborating with a cofacilitator.



## Select a Facilitator and a Recorder

Choosing a skilled facilitator and recorder will help ensure all voices are heard and conversations are well-documented. The facilitator is responsible for creating a safe environment, keeping conversation on track, and managing time. The facilitator should also set group guidelines and norms and state these before the meeting, such as avoiding personal attacks and respecting diversity of opinions. The recorder should work closely with the facilitator to capture key issues, areas of agreement and disagreement, and lingering questions. This way, you will have a foundation for future meetings, as well as documented feedback for your school administration or teachers.

## Define Your Goals

What are the goals of the community conversations? What does success look like for your group? The following are some possible goals you may set. Feel free to add your own community-specific goals as appropriate.

- Increased understanding among students about the whole child approach to learning; students must grasp the reasons why this is important if they are to respond effectively to the initiative.
- Better decision making that is informed by student input, leading to a more democratic approach to learning. Students respond more enthusiastically once they feel a sense of ownership and stake in their education; when students are treated as valued members of the community, they tend to rise to the occasion, making mature decisions and taking the assignment seriously. If decisions about their education are made for them, students are more likely to push back, further distancing themselves from the learning.
- Shared commitment between students and other stakeholders to pursue recommendations from the community conversations that focus on a whole child approach to learning.
- Raised awareness among students, leading to further involvement in creating and promoting a healthy, safe, challenging, supportive, and engaging atmosphere.

## Set Meeting Times and Sample Agenda

It may be difficult to find a time when students can meet for an extended period; we suggest breaking these conversations into four separate one-hour meetings. Use the sample agenda (see p. 10) to help organize your meetings. Use the guiding questions (see p. 8) to structure your conversations.

## Document Your Conversation

ASCD is eager to learn more about the issues that students find important to providing every child with a well-rounded education. After your discussion, please take a few minutes to e-mail as much of the following information as possible to

**wholechild@ascd.org:**

- A summary of key themes, questions, concerns, and quotations from participants.
- Action steps:
  - What will your specific group do next?
  - What are your recommendations to your district's school committee and administration?
- Recommendations for ASCD. Specifically, what do students believe needs to happen next?
- A list of participants and the grades they represent.

## Guiding Questions

**D**o students think that “educating the whole child” is important? If so, then what is their reaction to ASCD’s proposed five-point Whole Child Action Agenda? Use the following guiding questions to generate conversation and find answers to these issues.

### Part One: Meaning

- As students, what does the phrase “to educate the whole child” mean to you? What do you understand, and what is still unclear?
- How does this concept alter the way you perceive your education? In other words, what do you think this model would look like within your school?
- Reflect on your favorite class and teacher. What were the qualities that you appreciated most? How did your teacher create this positive atmosphere?

#### *Tools and Handouts:*

- Copies of the Whole Child Compact
- Copies of the five-point action agenda
- Copies of the guiding questions

### Part Two: Reactions

- What is your reaction to the five-point action agenda?
- How would your personal learning experience improve if your school and community followed this plan?
- What do you think your school is already doing to ensure a whole child approach to education?
- Does your school currently demonstrate the 21st century education that ASCD envisions? If so, how? How did your school get to this point? What were the necessary steps to achieve this? How did students react to these changes?

#### *Tools and Handouts:*

- Copies of your school’s mission statement
- Copies of the guiding questions
- Copies of the five-point action agenda
- Copies of the Whole Child Compact



### Part Three: Roles

- What is your role in this initiative as a student?
- Think about the five-point action agenda
  - How can you, as students, promote the ideals of the whole child within your school and community?
  - How can you generate greater awareness of the initiative within your school and community?
  - What community members can you reach out to in order to further advance the ideals of the whole child?

#### *Tools and Handouts:*

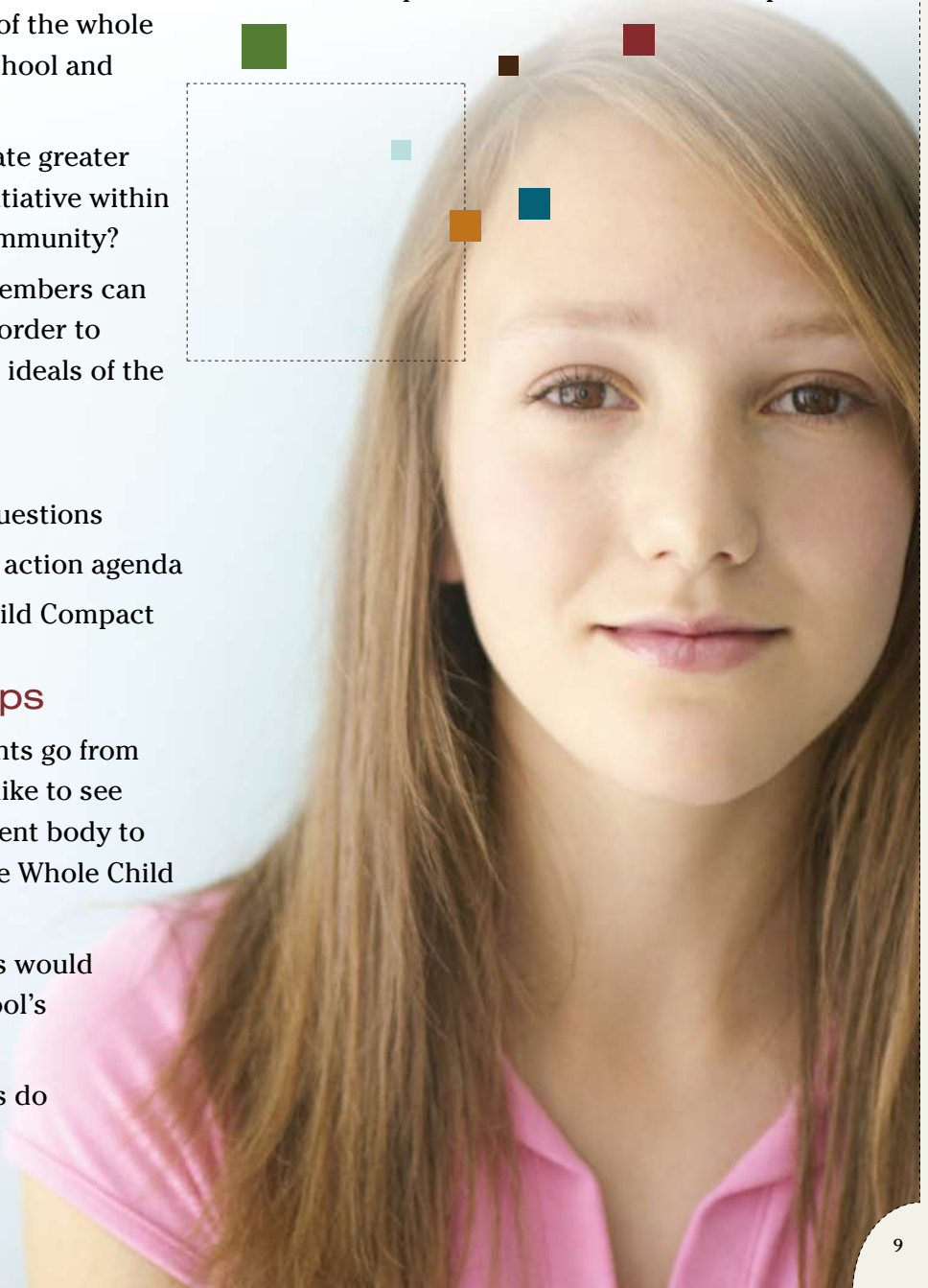
- Copies of the guiding questions
- Copies of the five-point action agenda
- Copies of the Whole Child Compact

### Part Four: Action Steps

- Where do you as students go from here? What would you like to see happen within the student body to further the values of the Whole Child Compact?
- What recommendations would you make for your school's administration?
- What recommendations do you have for ASCD?

#### *Tools and Handouts:*

- Copies of your school's mission statement
- Copies of the guiding questions
- Copies of the five-point action agenda
- Copies of the Whole Child Compact



## Sample Agenda: Community Conversations for High School Students

Whole Child Community Conversations Project  
 Anyplace, Anywhere  
 Insert Date and Time  
 Insert Location

|                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2:45–3:00 p.m. | <b>Welcome and Introduction</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                | Members introduce themselves. The advisor shares background information about the ASCD Whole Child Initiative and the purpose of the discussion.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 3:00–3:30 p.m. | <b>Discussion Begins</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                | <p>The facilitator helps the group stay on task, clarifies points as needed, and uses handouts to provide context and capture data from the group. Recorder captures key themes and questions.</p> <p><b>Meeting One: Understanding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delve deeply into these questions to ensure clarity.</li> <li>• Address all questions; encourage other students to respond.</li> <li>• Allow students to talk out their understanding.</li> </ul> <p><b>Meeting Two: Reactions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage all members to actively participate, providing feedback and personal responses.</li> <li>• Make certain that all voices are heard.</li> </ul> <p><b>Meeting Three: Roles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support all ideas and offer resources to make these ideas feasible.</li> <li>• Continue emphasizing the importance of student input and action.</li> </ul> <p><b>Meeting Four: Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage enthusiasm and motivate students to take ownership of their education.</li> </ul> |
| 3:30–3:45 p.m. | <b>Winding Down: Summary and Next Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                | The facilitator summarizes major findings, discusses next steps, and thanks participants for their time, noting that each participant will receive a follow-up letter with key themes and next steps.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

# The Whole Child Action Agenda

**A**SCD calls on parents, educators, policymakers, and communities to join forces to ensure our children become productive, engaged citizens. Our children deserve an education that emphasizes academic rigor as well as the essential 21st century skills of critical thinking and creativity. Specifically, our students must be

## HEALTHY

To ensure that all students are healthy, ASCD recommends, at a minimum:

- Schools have a health advisory council with students, family, community, and business members.
- Students are routinely screened for immunizations and vision, hearing, dental, and orthopedic concerns.
- Physical education and health classes emphasize lifetime healthy behaviors.
- Healthy food choices are available at school.

## SAFE AND SECURE

To ensure that all students are safe, ASCD recommends, at a minimum:

- Students, school staff, and family members establish and maintain behavioral expectations, rules, and routines.
- Families are welcomed by school staff as partners in their children's education.

## ENGAGED

To ensure that all students are adequately engaged, ASCD recommends, at a minimum:

- Students may participate in a wide array of extracurricular activities.
- Schools provide opportunities for community-based apprenticeships, internships, or projects.
- Teachers use active learning strategies such as cooperative learning and project-based learning.

## SUPPORTED

To ensure that all students are adequately supported, ASCD recommends, at a minimum:

- Every student has an adult advisor or mentor.
- Students have access to school counselors or other student support systems.

## CHALLENGED ACADEMICALLY

To ensure that all students are challenged academically with a well-balanced curriculum, ASCD recommends, at a minimum:

- Schools provide a well-rounded curriculum for all students.
- Students have access to rigorous programs in arts, foreign languages, and social studies.
- Schools maintain flexible graduation requirements.



Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.



Each student learns in an intellectually challenging environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.



 **WHOLE CHILD**  
**The New Compact**

FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS,  
COMMUNITIES, AND POLICYMAKERS

[www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)

Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.

Each student has access to personalized learning and to qualified, caring adults.

Each graduate is prepared for success in college or further study and for employment in a global environment.



Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
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Visit [www.wholechildeducation.org](http://www.wholechildeducation.org) for more information.

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