

Introduction

Merging Two Missions

Teachers come to work each day with lesson plans designed to meet curriculum standards. Many of those teachers know that those standards alone do not address all the lessons they want their students to learn. There is a second part of their mission: for students to develop the skills to manage their adolescent years in preparation for adulthood. Most school mission statements include the goals of supporting young people to both achieve academically and contribute to their communities. Through every day lessons and expectations, in addition to academic mastery, middle and high schools aspire to help students develop social skills, problem solving, autonomy, civic responsibility, and goals for their learning and future.

Achieving both parts of the mission is very demanding. School days are brimming with requirements, structures, and routines—some new, some over a century old and clearly in need of reform—that make it difficult for educators to fulfill all the lofty ideals of their mission statements.

This book supports the fulfillment of the whole mission because middle and high school students come to school each day as whole teens. They have interests and questions, moods and needs, competencies and gaps, histories and dreams, relationships with others and awareness of themselves—in an infinite variation of degrees and combinations that resist any rigid definitions. When educators work with them as whole teens, they support their academic success and their personal development, which are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Innumerable educators have, through their practice or research, recognized the importance of seeing all students as whole people, wherever they are in their development. Many in the field, including our colleagues at ASCD's Whole Child Initiative, or The Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, emphasize serving the whole student. Those efforts have helped in our understanding. We chose not to create a specific program or to propose finite definitions. When we write about the whole teen, we ask the reader to join with us in maintaining a wide, deep, and complex understanding, which by necessity would burst through the boundaries of any explicit definition—as so many whole teens seem to do.

Who Is This Book For?

Teachers will find many classroom practices they can employ on their own to improve teaching, learning, and adolescent development. Collaborating with colleagues, they will find practices and structures that can be implemented in their middle school cluster, their high school department, their grade level, or their whole school.

School and district leaders will find practices for themselves as well as for teachers and students, and discussion prompts for faculty meetings. Whether your school is delving into social-emotional learning, character education, school climate efforts, or related approaches, the practices and structures offered will fit, deepen, and connect those efforts. Many district leaders implement programming at the elementary level to support both academic achievement and personal development, while struggling with how to serve both goals at their secondary schools. This book is full of strategies to develop school cultures and programs that work with adolescents.

This book includes practices for **teachers, counselors, and school leaders** for their own use, and language and ideas for connecting their practices across their roles, creating more unified approaches for working with teens. **Counselors and teachers** who are playing leadership roles on committees, research teams, and in professional development will find many options to support their efforts.

There are pages in each chapter in Part II so that **teachers, counselors, and administrators** can communicate and partner with **parents and guardians**, extending the concepts for use at home. While adolescent years can involve significant turmoil, it is too often the case—for many complex reasons—that families are less engaged with their teens' schooling than they were at the elementary level. We hope that the "Practices at Home" pages will support robust school-family engagement efforts. We encourage these pages to be shared in parent workshops and discussion groups, as part of staff professional development, when consulting with specific parents and guardians who turn to the school for support, and when seeking to expand the policies and resources that unite a community—to embrace the notion that all teens are "our kids" (Putnam, 2015). When adults are talking with each other, everyone—families, educators, students—benefit.

All adults who encounter students affect them. Numerous strategies in the book apply to the school's **secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers**, and especially **professional aides**, who are often students' trusted allies. Sharing practices with them is impactful and a sign of respect.

Professors of education and candidates in teacher, school counselor, and school leadership programs often need a bridge from theory to practice. As much as we are active and enthusiastic consumers of research, we are practitioners. We anticipate that our applications of theory to practice will support their learning and effectiveness.

In addition to our focus on classrooms and schools, we make numerous connections to clubs, teams, and after-school settings. **Coaches, club advisors, tutors, mentors, internship organizers, and youth development agency staff** will find many relevant practices for their programs and efforts.

Finally, we hope **policymakers** will consider the information in this book. Education in the United States has gone through a few waves of accountability pressure in the last century (Mehta, 2015). Accountability alone does not foster effective teaching, learning, development, employability, or citizenship. Schools must have the robust support of policymakers in order to fulfill all the elements of their missions.

Overview of the Book

Part I, Seeing the Whole Teen, sorts through research on adolescent development, including what to call all those skills beyond the traditional 3Rs. We look at the many challenges and opportunities that are predictable parts of adolescence—and ones that are dependent on the specific young person. We consider teenagers who grow up in distinct communities, often coming to schools with distinct strengths, opportunities, and challenges. Part I offers insights from the study of neuroeducation, resilience, identity development, cultural competence, and several other fields. Educators' days are frenetic and packed; we hope that you find these chapters both valuable and succinct.

Part II, Everyday Practices, focuses on classroom strategies for Grades 6 through 12. We provide everyday practices to teach the whole teen, and to shape the classroom culture to model essential skills and values. Chapters include activities, routines and rituals, discussion formats and prompts, projects, teaching tools, and student hand-outs. Following those pages are discussion prompts for faculty to use in their individual and collaborative learning and planning processes.

Each chapter of Part II also includes “Practices at Home,” approaches that parents and guardians can use with their adolescents, building many of the same skills being addressed in school. We hope that these shared and parallel practices offer a much-needed bridge between the often disconnected efforts of all the adults in the lives of teenagers.

Part III, The Whole School Surrounds the Whole Teen, looks at many ways leaders (we use that term to include many members of the school community) develop a schoolwide culture that supports the whole teen. We address the faculty culture, options for shifting school structures, the critical need to support novice teachers, and practices that sustain the leaders.

Helping teachers, counselors, parents, and administrators have a whole teen approach, teaching the skills *and* shaping the classroom and school cultures to model and reinforce those skills, is our goal for this book. Contributing to a thriving, healthy, and just society remains our larger mission.

Notes About Nomenclature

Grades 6 through 12 include a large developmental span, so we use varied terms to refer to the students: *teens*, *teenagers*, *adolescents*, *young people*, *students*, and occasionally *kids*, *preteens*, or *young adults*. Different terms fit the specifics of a given topic, or its spirit. Unless otherwise stated, we mean the terms to be as inclusive as

possible. In your setting, students are also likely identified as advisees, daughters, sons, siblings, coworkers, team members, musicians, artists, athletes, employees, and much more—the range of roles they assume is vast, and every setting has opportunities to develop their skills and identities.

In parallel fashion, we know that many middle school and high school educators play several roles. Teachers and counselors serve as club advisors and athletic team coaches. Some administrators teach a course. Sports and arts staff typically work with students for multiple years, often serving as informal mentors. Any of these adults might run an advisory group. Though we refer most often to *teachers, faculty, or staff*, we encourage you to apply the concepts and practices in this book to all the ways you interact with the incredibly complex and fascinating people who attend middle schools and high schools.



Visit the companion website at
<http://www.resources.corwin.com/PolinerBensonWholeTeen>
for downloadable resources.

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