



THE HEART OF IT

With Executive Director **DEB DELISLE**

Preparing Students to Be "Life Ready"

Schools have always had their fair share of external observers and evaluators—those who scrutinize programs, instruction, and curriculum. As I interact with educators across our country, I fear that this attention has become far deeper and more intense than ever before. Whether warranted or not, this scrutiny has given way to questions about how our students are being prepared for their future and not our present. Unfortunately, an intense focus on accountability has pushed schools into becoming overly reliant on strict academic measures as opposed to a more holistic system in which academics are considered alongside equally important life skills.

It is clear that our students will find themselves in a global society that routinely crosses time zones and cultures. Simultaneously, they will have access to an endless, and sometimes inauthentic, flow of information and news online. How will these future world citizens think critically and responsively about their civic responsibilities? Not only do they need to be equipped with deep analytical skills, they must also be comfortable relating with—and advocating for—their peers, including those from different backgrounds. This issue of *Education Update* tackles some of these important challenges facing educators.

For almost 10 years, ASCD has promoted the use of the Whole Child framework. We believe that all students must be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged—five components that purposefully align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Schools that embrace the Whole Child framework create a culture that ensures their students are healthy and safe, both physically and emotionally.

Students who feel vulnerable to attack are not open to learning. In the article "Raising Upstanders," we read about classrooms like Sonia Galaviz's, where kids role-play bullying scenarios and practice strategies for effective intervention. Such activities allow students to develop essential life skills, like empathy, that will help chart their course as adults navigating an increasingly diverse and complex world.

Recently I visited a school that had a Buddy Bench on its playground. I sat with a 2nd grader who shared that she sat on the bench every day waiting for someone who needed a buddy. When I asked her why she did that, she told me shyly, "I came to this school last year and was afraid because I didn't know anyone. I sat on this bench on my second day and found my best friend so now I want to be someone else's best friend." Such a simple statement, yet so profound. Beyond developing students to be college and career ready, this school was also preparing kids to be "life ready."

After visiting hundreds of classrooms across the country, my optimism for our future continues to grow as I witness amazing examples of students standing up for others, championing causes, and developing their leadership skills. Kindergarten to seniors in high school are acquiring essential skills that prepare them for life. From taking on climate issues to advocating for social justice to developing communities of support for recently arrived immigrants and refugees, students are learning in countless ways how to be leaders, how to identify their interests and, most important, how to engage in learning that reaches beyond the confines of a textbook.

With the launch of the Every Student Succeeds Act, states and districts

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are contemplating accountability systems that incorporate additional measures of student success, including those labeled "nonacademic." Although I would argue that empathy, leadership, and engagement require an intellectual foundation, students will benefit from greater priority being placed on essential life skills. Too often, accountability systems rely solely on academic measures—but just imagine how much richer our country would be if these systems prioritized growing kids' hearts as well as their minds.

Classrooms have become havens of hope for so many students. I applaud educators who attend to the five basic tenets of the Whole Child approach, as they are truly focusing on the basic needs of all humans.

Here's to the kids who teach us so much and to the educators who learn from them every day! ASCD is proud to partner with you on this journey. ■