

HELP



IS HERE!

ACCESSING
SCHOOL-BASED
SUPPORT



KALEIDOSCOPE
WELLNESS AND EDUCATION
GROUP, LLC

I've worked with many students, parents and other concerned adults throughout my 20 year career as a school social worker, school mental health program manager and senior director of school mental health. One thing that has been iterated and reiterated year after year is that it is difficult for families to navigate the education system and gain access to help when it is needed.



This free e-book is meant to provide students and caregivers with a basic understanding of available supports and how to access them.



Schools, like most institutions, provide services based upon need. Some students thrive without additional support. Others need accommodations and modifications to thrive while others need specialized instruction. Regardless of a student's level of need, however, **every school should provide its students with a free and appropriate education according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**. In today's world, that means that schools should provide opportunities for a student's wholistic growth at a bare minimum.

Whole person development doesn't just focus on academic achievement or cognitive development but considers all of the things that contribute to an individual's growth to include **mental wellness, physical well-being, identity development, and opportunities for social engagement** among other things. While academic achievement remains a central goal of education, focusing solely on grades and test scores overlooks other, vital aspects of a student's development. In fact, research has shown that whole person development enhances academic outcomes by promoting a positive school climate, reducing behavioral issues, and increasing student engagement (Durlak et al., 2011). A narrow focus on academic performance can neglect students' overall well-being and limit their growth and potential.

Whole Person Development Put into Practice



The whole person approach recognizes that we are all made up of many different systems that impact one another. It recognizes that “we cannot remember, concentrate, focus, attend, learn, et cetera when we are hungry, fearful, unsure, or otherwise preoccupied” (Coleman, 2023). Ultimately, to engage the best version of a person means to be aware that the person is having several simultaneous experiences at the same time to include the one that relates to your role in the person’s life at the time.

In our pursuit of building authentic connections, we are tasked with going beyond superficial interactions and penetrating the layers that make up a person’s whole being. It is a practice that demands patience, sensitivity, and an unwavering commitment to understanding the individual. By doing so, we create a space where the hungry are nourished, the fearful find solace, the unsure gain clarity, and the preoccupied can momentarily let go of their burdens. In this safe and nurturing environment, where all facets of an individual’s experience are acknowledged and tended to, we pave the way for the emergence of their truest and best self.

Schools at every level should provide opportunities for students to explore their passions, develop critical thinking abilities, and cultivate emotional intelligence.



Elementary School (Grades K-5)

Elementary schools play a crucial role in laying the foundation for a child's wholistic development by focusing on creating safe and inclusive environments wherein students can develop their social and emotional skills.

- ✓ Classroom activities should promote cooperation, empathy, and self-awareness.
- ✓ Physical education programs, recess, and extracurricular activities should encourage students to engage in regular exercise and lead healthy lifestyles.
- ✓ Elementary schools should also incorporate character education programs and/or social emotional learning programs that emphasize values such as respect, responsibility, and kindness specifically to help students build strong moral foundations.



Middle School (Grades 6-8)

Middle schools take the whole person approach further by providing students with opportunities to explore their interests and talents.

- ✓ Middle schools should offer a diverse range of extracurricular activities, clubs, and sports teams and afford students an opportunity to engage in activities beyond the classroom.
- ✓ These activities should encourage teamwork, leadership, and personal growth.
- ✓ To support the social and emotional development of middle school students, many schools provide counseling services, peer mentoring programs, and anti-bullying initiatives.
- ✓ Middle schools should also incorporate comprehensive health education to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary for making informed decisions about their physical, mental and sexual well-being.



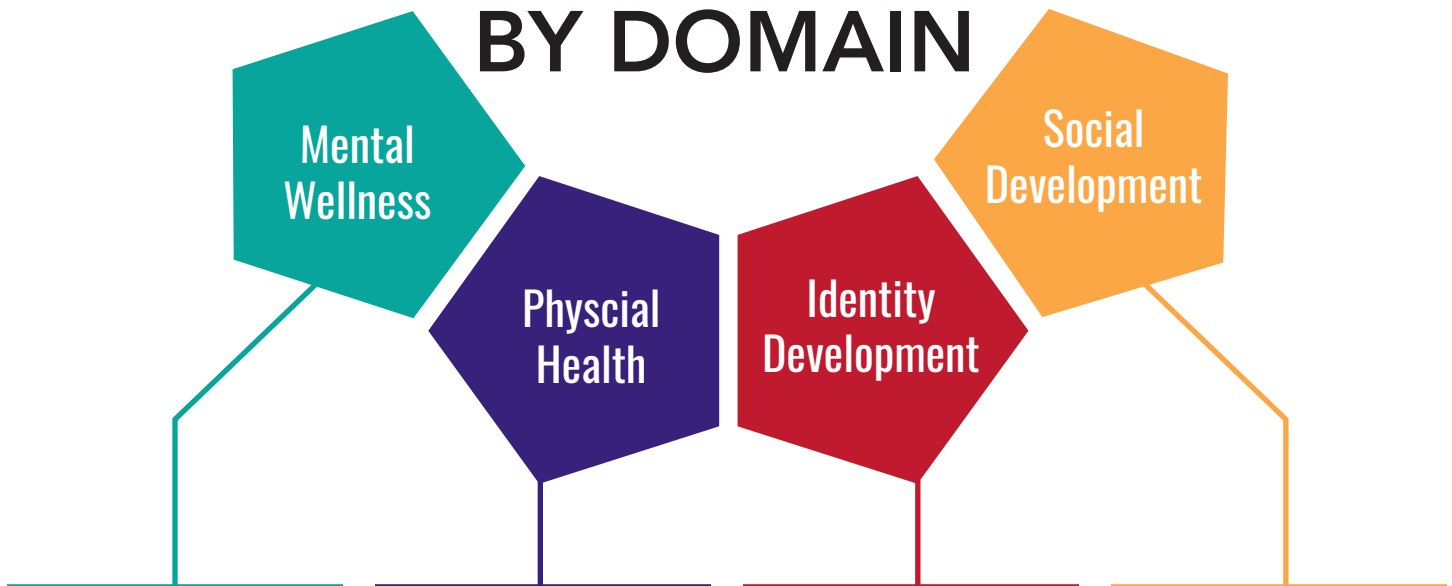
High School (Grades 9-12)

High schools embrace the whole child approach by focusing on preparing students for their future, both academically and personally.

- ✓ They should offer a wide variety of academic pathways, such as advanced placement courses, career and technical education programs, and dual enrollment opportunities, catering to students' diverse interests and goals.
- ✓ High schools should also prioritize college and career guidance and provide resources and support for post-secondary education or entering the workforce.
- ✓ To ensure the well-being of their students, high schools should establish wellness centers, counseling services, and mental health initiatives. These initiatives create a supportive environment where students can seek help, learn how to manage their emotions, and develop resilience.

Schools at every level have a responsibility to offer a diverse range of subjects and extracurricular activities in environments that empower students to thrive academically, emotionally, socially, morally and more. A true whole person approach not only equips students with knowledge but also instills in them the skills, values, and attitudes necessary to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives. Schools must prioritize and invest in initiatives that promote the overall development of their students.

WHOLE PERSON DEVELOPMENT BY DOMAIN



Mental wellness and emotional well-being are fundamental components of a whole person. Together, they shape students' ability to learn and thrive. When students feel safe, supported, and connected to their school community, they are more likely to **develop positive self-esteem, resilience, and a growth mindset** (Zins et al., 2004). Encouraging emotional intelligence, empathy, and self-regulation skills can help students **navigate challenges, cope with stress, and develop healthy relationships**, both inside and outside the classroom (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Healthy bodies support healthy minds. Physical health plays a significant role in promoting **optimal cognitive function, memory retention, and attention span** (Chomitz et al., 2009). Incorporating regular physical activity, adequate nutrition, and a supportive school environment can contribute to **improved academic performance and reduced absenteeism** (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). By prioritizing physical health within the school curriculum, educators can enhance students' overall well-being and academic success.

Developing a positive view of self plays a crucial role in the wholistic development of an individual, as it shapes and influences various aspects of their life such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, and personal interests. Understanding and embracing one's identity is essential for **fostering self-awareness, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging**. Identity also plays a significant role in interpersonal relationships and social interactions. By understanding their own identity, individuals become more open to **embracing and appreciating the diversity of others, which leads to increased empathy, respect, and tolerance towards different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives**. A strong sense of identity can also serve as a source of **support and resilience in the face of discrimination or adversity**, as individuals draw strength from their cultural or social affiliations.

A robust social development component is crucial for students to thrive in diverse and interconnected societies. Social skills, such as communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution, equip students with the tools to **build positive relationships and navigate social dynamics effectively** (Elias et al., 1997). A supportive school environment that fosters inclusivity, cultural competence, and respect for diversity can enhance social development and contribute to the creation of a compassionate and equitable community.

What do I do when my student needs more?



A whole person approach to education is absolutely vital yet, it does not address every need. Simply put, some students need more and that's okay. The truth is that we all need help at some point in our lives especially post pandemic.

Schools assess students to determine how much more a person might need. The assessment process can intensify over time and include observations, consultations with professionals, and various types of evaluations. The evaluation process always includes a multidisciplinary team of educators, specialists, parents, and older students. Each student's process is different.

Some receive additional support quickly and others receive help after some time. Reasons for these differences are varied but include time to implement student support plans and measure a student's growth (or lack thereof), difficulty defining the presenting problem, inability to receive critical data back in a timely manner, et cetera.

Generally speaking, school teams decide to support students in one of three ways:

SUPPORT PLAN: School teams gather and develop a plan based upon what they know to be true from experience. They progress monitor a student's response to the plan and make changes based upon the data. If the interventions on the student's plan are helpful and improvement is noted, the school team may decide to continue to work with the student as described on the plan. If problems persist, the school team will likely continue assessing the student further.

504 PLAN: Per the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a 504 plan is designed to support students with disabilities that substantially limit one or more major life activities, such as learning or communication, but do not necessarily require specialized instruction. A 504 plan ensures that students have equal access to

education by providing modifications, reasonable accommodations and/or supportive services.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP): An IEP is a legally binding document developed for students who require specialized instruction to meet their unique educational needs. It provides a roadmap for the student's education and includes specific goals, objectives, and services tailored to the student's individual needs. To qualify for an IEP, students must meet the specific criteria outlined in IDEA, which requires their disability to adversely impact educational performance and necessitate specialized instruction. Students with an IEP can also receive modifications, reasonable accommodations and/or supportive services.

The journey from general education to special education can feel overwhelming, but understanding the options available can empower students and their families to navigate the process with confidence. **Seeking additional support for students starts with ensuring that schools are utilizing a whole person approach and affording the student multiple opportunities to develop wholistically.** This is a MUST! If the student continues to have unmet needs though the school has offered a positive school climate and rich wholistic engagement, additional help via a support plan, 504 plan or an IEP should be explored. These support systems aim to ensure that every student, regardless of their disability, has equal access to education. Students will receive one or the other based upon their individual need.

TERMS DEFINED

Assessment: Assessment is ongoing. It refers to a process of gathering information over time to seek understanding.

Accommodations: Accommodations are adjustments in the classroom setting that support learning such as preferential seating movement breaks and extended time to complete assignments.

Disability: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) each have specific definitions of what a disability is. Generally speaking, a disability is *any condition that makes it difficult or impossible for a person to do certain things.*

Evaluation: Evaluation refers to a person's level of functioning at a moment in time. Comparable to the assessment process, the evaluation process involves collecting information, but the data collected only reflects the person's ability at the time the data was collected. Evaluations are typically completed every three years.

Modifications: Modifications refer to changes in the curriculum that are aligned to the student's academic abilities. These changes include simplified assignments and alternate assignments.

Related services: Related services are services such as counseling, speech and language therapy, et cetera that help a student access the curriculum and benefit from instruction.

Specialized instruction: Specialized instruction is instruction tailored to a student's specific needs to help them access and benefit from their education. A student must have an IEP to receive specialized instruction.

Self-advocacy



Identifying and addressing difficulties faced by students is crucial for their overall well-being and academic success. It is essential to recognize when a student is struggling and to take immediate action. Some cues are difficulty following instructions especially multi-step instructions, difficulty recalling, irritation, increasingly poor grades, et cetera. Educators will often share their concerns when these cues and others are demonstrated. Acknowledging the presence of a problem is the first step in the assessment process. By creating an open and supportive environment, we can encourage students to speak up about their challenges.

“If your student is having difficulty, say something! Do not wait.” This simple yet powerful statement underscores the importance of timely intervention. Silence can often exacerbate the problem, causing the student to suffer silently. Students, educators, parents, and guardians must understand that a student’s ability to express their concerns may be hindered by fear, embarrassment, or a lack of awareness about available resources. The consequences of untreated difficulties can be far-reaching, affecting various aspects of a student’s life. It is not uncommon for academic struggles to extend beyond the classroom, impacting a student’s emotional well-being, relationships, and self-esteem. Recognizing the interconnectedness of these domains is crucial in understanding the full extent of a student’s challenges.

Each school and school district has a person you can reach out to for support. At the school level, there should be a person over special education. This person is normally a vice principal. School psychologists and related service providers such as social workers and speech and language therapists can also inform you about the evaluation process and let you know who the point of contact is at the student's school. Every person at the school level is supervised by someone at your school district's administrative offices. These supervisors are likely a part of The Office of Student Supports or a comparable office.

The assessment process takes time, especially if the student is having difficulty in several domains. It is important to acknowledge that identifying and addressing the underlying issues may require a comprehensive evaluation. Evaluations conducted by professionals skilled in identifying learning disabilities, mental health concerns, or other potential barriers to academic success can provide valuable insights.

It is important to remain patient and empathetic during the evaluation process. Students may feel anxious or overwhelmed while being evaluated. It is essential to provide them with support and reassurance especially because we all need help at some point. The evaluation process simply helps us understand how much help a student needs and in what area. Understanding that each student's journey is unique and that the process may take time helps create an atmosphere of trust and collaboration.



You don't have to navigate the process blindly.

National resources can offer a wealth of specialized expertise, programs, and interventions tailored to meet the unique needs of students. These include:

- Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) - www.dredf.org
- National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) - www.nclld.org
- Wrightslaw - www.wrightslaw.com
- National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) - www.ndrn.org
- Understood - www.understood.org

These resources may include educational support services, counseling centers, or organizations dedicated to assisting students with specific challenges. By leveraging these external resources, educators and parents can provide students with a comprehensive network of support.

You can also work with an educational advocate like those at **Kaleidoscope Wellness and Education Group**. They are experts at navigating the educational system and can work alongside you to ensure that your student is supported.



Conclusion

In conclusion, by recognizing the interconnectedness of academic and emotional well-being, we can ensure that students receive the comprehensive support they require. Patience and empathy are key during the assessment process, understanding that each student's journey is unique. National resources can supplement the efforts of schools and provide students with the assistance they need to thrive academically and personally. Together, we can create inclusive and supportive educational environments that enable every student to reach their full potential.

This ebook is meant to help students and caring adults find the best support for students who they believe may need additional help. I am authoring a more comprehensive book to help families who may need specifics to get help tailored to the unique needs of their student. The book will utilize a case study and include specific examples of a support plan, a 504 plan and an IEP. The book will be available for purchase soon on all of my social media platforms.

ADDITIONAL HELP AND RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE AT:

 www.wellnessineducation.org  [msdrkenya](https://www.instagram.com/msdrkenya)  [MsDrKenya](https://www.facebook.com/MsDrKenya)  [MsDrKenya](https://www.twitter.com/MsDrKenya)

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