

COMMENTARY

Current Circumstances Accentuate the Need to Educate the Whole Child



AUTHOR

[Roman Stearns](#) | Scaling Student Success

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How many times have you heard the chorus, “We need to educate the whole child?”

That is the call by scientists and researchers who have studied child development, the science of learning, the history of education, and labor market projections. It is the plea of counselors and school psychologists who attend daily to students suffering from the ill-effects of bullying, academic pressure, racial violence, and school yard shootings. It is the advice of educational leaders who are concerned that an overemphasis on standardized tests and admissions to elite colleges has narrowed the curriculum.

Parents and teachers see and experience the whole child on a daily basis and inherently know that one cannot separate intellectual advancement from social, emotional, and physical development.

In fact, few argue with the benefits of, and need for, educating the whole child. While we may have reached a tipping point of *thought*, our collective *action* lags far behind. The rapid spread of [Coronavirus](#) and its sudden, dramatic impact on schools gives us a much greater sense of urgency.

YOUNG PEOPLE FACE NEW DEMANDS

At this moment, our children are being called upon to be resilient, adaptable, and empathetic. We need them to step up and be compassionate, civically minded and ethically responsible. Teachers expect them to demonstrate their digital literacy and communicate effectively across platforms. Parents expect them to be independent learners, self-directed, intellectually curious, and resourceful. We all hope that they will exercise curiosity, creativity and critical thinking to identify and approach real world problems that just weeks ago were unanticipated and unpredictable. And, now more than ever, we pray that they maintain a healthy mind and body. All of these competencies (and more) result from educating the whole child.

This moment of disruption is also an opportunity to stop and ask how best to educate the whole child. While we continue to explore possibilities, many school districts have already taken a first step by engaging community stakeholders to create a [Graduate Profile](#)—a succinct, one-pager defining the skills, competencies, and mindsets necessary for future success in college, career, and civic engagement. Leaders of these districts recognize that the measures contained in our state accountability system *may be necessary*, but *are far from sufficient* to catapult our young people into an unknown future or prepare them for the

unexpected.

A NEW COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE EXPLORES STRATEGIES

A pioneering group of school districts that recognize the power and potential of a Graduate Profile have joined a new California partnership called [Scaling Student Success](#). Together, they have formed a **Community of Practice** in order to operationalize their Graduate Profiles and hold themselves collectively accountable for assuring that each and every student has an opportunity to develop and demonstrate the competencies articulated in their respective Graduate Profiles. They know that moving “from poster to practice” is hard work and takes years, but is worth pursuing in order to meet the needs of the students they serve.

The graphic is a large blue circle with a white border. Inside the circle is a white graduation cap with a tassel. Below the cap is a white banner with the text "SAN LEANDRO" in blue. Below the banner is a white banner with the text "UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT" in blue. Below the banner is a white banner with the text "TRADITION & INNOVATION" in blue. The words "GRADUATE" and "PROFILE" are written in large, bold, blue letters on the left and right sides of the circle respectively.

CRITICAL THINKERS

WE

ANTICIPATE, PERSEVERE AND REFLECT

- Confront challenges and use them as opportunities to learn, reflect and grow

ARE OPEN AND CURIOUS

- Ask questions to better understand
- Collect, analyze and evaluate information

ARE FLEXIBLE AND CREATIVE

- Identify problems and imagine new possibilities or solutions
- Adapt knowledge and skills to use in multiple settings

HEALTHY MIND & BODY

WE

PURSUE A PASSIONATE, JOYFUL AND VIBRANT LIFE

- Are confident in our intellectual, physical and emotional well-being
- Build interpersonal skills and healthy relationships for life
- Are able to make informed daily choices compatible with a healthy lifestyle
- Are lifelong learners

COMMUNICATORS & COLLABORATORS

WE

LISTEN

- Seek to understand and hear multiple perspectives

DELIVER INFORMATION EFFECTIVELY

- Advocate, teach, inform, clarify

COLLABORATE

- Are flexible and able to work with diverse teams in complex settings
- Build consensus when making decisions

ETHICAL & CULTURAL LEADERS

WE

ACT WITH INTEGRITY AND RESPECT FOR SELF AND OTHERS

- Recognize the value of diversity
- Are responsible for our behavior, actions and choices

INITIATE ACTIONS AND ARE COMMITTED TO SHAPING A BETTER COMMUNITY AND WORLD

- Act with compassion and empathy
- Engage in conversations to create inclusive and welcoming communities
- Use our cultural knowledge to engage in a diverse world and advocate for equity

The graphic is a large blue circle with a white border. Inside the circle is a white graduation cap with a tassel. Below the cap is a white banner with the text "CENTINELA VALLEY UNION" in blue. Below the banner is a white banner with the text "HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT" in blue. Below the banner is a white banner with the text "GRADUATE PROFILE" in blue. The words "GRADUATE" and "PROFILE" are written in large, bold, blue letters on the left and right sides of the circle respectively.

**CENTINELA VALLEY UNION
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**GRADUATE
PROFILE**

COLLEGE & CAREER READY INDIVIDUALS

Graduates will develop and manage a clearly articulated post secondary plan that is aligned with their academic and/or career goals and personal passions.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS

Graduates will be able to express thoughts and articulate ideas through verbal, non-verbal, written, and technological means.

ETHICAL LEADERS

Graduates will demonstrate ethical leadership through effective decision making and self management by understanding their personal strengths and weaknesses.

**INDEPENDENT & COLLABORATIVE
CRITICAL THINKERS & PROBLEM SOLVERS**

Graduates will exercise critical thinking skills to independently and collaboratively address the nature of a problem and propose creative solutions.

**SOCIALLY AWARE & RESPONSIVE
COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Graduates will act as productive citizens who serve in the community to improve the quality of life for their local, national, and global community.

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Created by San Leandro Unified School District, 2018

The Scaling Student Success Community of Practice operates as an improvement network, sharing promising practices and lessons learned, leveraging available tools and resources, pushing each other’s thinking, experimenting with new strategies, promoting continuous improvement, identifying and supporting enabling policies, and more. The districts are surrounded by a curated group of expert support providers who can help them with every step of the process to operationalize their Graduate Profiles, whether it’s adopting common rubrics against which to assess student progress on Graduate Profile outcomes, strategizing ways to support those outcomes through extended learning opportunities, or building out college and career pathways as a contextualized structure for promoting them.

The challenges our students and schools face in the midst of this pandemic put immediacy behind the changes so many

communities have already endorsed through the development of these Graduate Profiles. Educating the whole child is even more of an imperative today than ever before; it's one many districts are taking on with growing zeal and determination.

Roman Stearns is the founder and executive director of Scaling Student Success, a new California partnership dedicated to educating the whole child. This commentary originally appeared on the Scaling Student Success website

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