

Effecting Achievement and Equity in Education Initiative

The Whole Child Approach to Educationⁱ

The evolving needs of the 21st century require a new approach to education to fully prepare students for their path of choice –college, university, trade or certificate program, work, among others, as well as skills and experiences that support youth to become informed, engaged contributors in our communities.

Launched in 2007, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development’s (ASCD) Whole Child approach is an effort to change the conversation about education from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children. A Whole Child approach, which ensures that each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, sets the standard for comprehensive, sustainable school improvement and provides for long-term student success. This approach works to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow by addressing students' comprehensive needs through the shared responsibility of students, families, schools, and communities.

The Whole Child approach is part of a current, larger conversation around equity in education and the reality that every child walks into their classroom each day with varying preparedness to learn. Educational inequality permeating our poorer school districts due to embedded racial inequity and unequal access to education are systemic issues that impact student’s access to health, safety, engagement, support and academic rigor.

Other efforts to address equity in education include implementation of the Common Core Standards (Common Core), a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy. Implementation of the Common Core represents a significant and vitally important step for our nation to promote rigorous, high-quality education and positive outcomes for all students. And while the initiative is widely supported, adoption and implementation is varied. Regional Equity Assistance Centers, funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, calls for the Common Core to address Six Goals of Equity that ensure equity for all student groups, especially those who are underserved and underrepresentedⁱⁱ. The issues facing the education ecosystem are complex and interconnected.

Whole Child Tenets

- Each student enters school **healthy** and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
- Each student learns in an 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 is **supported** by qualified, caring adults.
- Each student is **challenged** academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.

Relationship Building

As a community organization dedicated to creating sustainable leadership for social justice, Be Present, Inc. believes, as supporters of the Whole Child approach do, that students, families, schools, and communities must work collaboratively to provide an environment that is socially and emotionally supportive and conducive to learning. We know that success requires establishing strong partnerships, connecting students and families to support, creating wide-ranging opportunities to learn, and removing barriers to full participation. All these factors create a strong educational foundation for students. This is the work that Be Present, Inc. engages in through our *Effecting Achievement and Equity in Education* initiative, which includes the *Children and Youth Learning & Play* model that is infused throughout our organizational structure and programs.

Implementing the Whole Child approach calls for new models of relationship-building among all participants in the education ecosystem (students, parents/caregivers, teachers, administrators and youth-serving and community leaders) to move us from a vision of the Whole Child approach to sustainable, collaborative action. Relationship building at its core must be inclusive of all voices representing diverse genders, sexualities, identities, races, classes, ages and other dimensions of identity. Bringing people together from diverse backgrounds to talk with one another across boundaries develops connection and fosters adaptability and capacity for collective action. This process is intentional and requires tools and a platform for dialogue. Relationship building begins on the individual level, in which each person develops their capacity for change. In joining with others who are also developing their capacity for change, we magnify our abilities and resources to realize and practice the tenants of the Whole Child approach.

The Be Present Empowerment Model® | Leadership Competencies

Training participants in all levels of the education ecosystem to develop leadership competencies is an essential factor in building inclusive relationships that move us to sustainable, collaborative action. Competencies are knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors. Development of leadership competencies on the individual, intergroup and community/institutional level enables all participants to be ambassadors; and thereby ensuring environments that create a strong educational foundation for all students.

Be Present, Inc.'s (www.bepresent.org) Be Present Empowerment Model® (BPEM®) is a proven leadership framework, rooted in 35 years of expertise delivering training to children, youth and adults in education, health, environment, philanthropy, among others. It provides a platform for learning, dialogue and practice -- an inclusive approach to leadership that supports individuals and groups to cross boundaries of all types – race, gender, class, age, religion and culture – and commit to cooperative learning, shared responsibility, mutual accountability, and joint action.

Through intensive training (one-day, multi-day, and 18-month sessions) and ongoing systems of support (Be Present Peer Support Groups®), participants in the education ecosystem develop skills and competencies through practice in community. Learning the BPEM® also enables participants to address the issues that have an impact on the capacity of their schools and institutions to partner more effectively with each other and the youth they serve.

Three Interrelated Leadership Realms and Tools:

- Know Yourself Outside the Distress of Oppression: *The ability to know and nurture authentic self*
- Listen to Others in a Conscious and Present State: *The ability to be present and fully aware when interacting with others*
- Build Effective Relationships and Sustain True Alliances: *The ability to develop, maintain, and sustain authentic partnerships with people inside, or outside the institution*

Levels of Impact:

Level	Leadership Competencies	Outcomes
Individual	Inner resilience – including strengthening self-knowledge and self-empowerment; and abilities to question, engage, connect, think creatively, reflect and take positive action	Increased confidence, responsibility, classroom productivity, empathy, social and emotional intelligence, accountability
Intergroup	Builds skills for effective collaboration – including addressing different sides of issues, transforming conflict, active listening, building trust and creating supportive relationships	Fun, meaningful opportunities, recognition, sense of belonging, information-sharing and learning, innovation
Institutional/ Community	Strengthens the capacity for outer resilience and larger-scale change – including sustaining diversity, equity and inclusion, addressing critical challenges, increasing access to opportunities, providing incentives for action	Equitable policies, procedures, practices and culture, engagement and satisfaction, sustainability

The Be Present Empowerment Model® in Practice | Be Present Youth Leaders

Individual

“It’s a way to show where you can stay with yourself and be kind to others and that you can be a better person and feel better if you follow the Model.”

“The indicators for feelings describe how you have to know how you are feeling so you don’t act it out on other people. The indicators for body helps you pay attention to your body because sometimes you don’t know how you are feeling so your body can tell you how. These are two of the indicators for the first realm, Know Yourself Outside of the Distress of Oppression.”

“I used the first realm in class when I don’t think I am paying attention. I find a way to pay attention and actually listen to what the teacher is saying.”

“I get in an argument and calm myself down by remembering the Model.”

Intergroup

“I think it means to always listen to what someone is saying and to always know who you are even if you are jealous of someone else, to be grateful that you are you. The Be Present Empowerment Model is to know yourself, to listen, and to share.”

“We listen to other people by letting the talker be the guide so no one talks when they are talking and not interrupt and to support that person. We support the person who is talking by listening and not whispering and have the other person feel bad, because they are talking. You can ask questions that help support that person not questions like ‘what color was that?’ but instead asking ‘what did that feel like.’ Sometimes we put a hand on someone to support them. I like to draw when I am listening because it keeps my hands busy but I can still listen.”

“Sometimes when we are at recess I encourage other people to keep going or I will tell them nice try.”

“I listen to my friends when they share hard, fun times and good times which helps build our relationships and make us closer.”

Institutional/Community

“In a group project I will make sure that everyone understands the work is a collective work opportunity and make sure everybody agrees with it. I ask questions. I will make sure to explain it to other people and use my communication skills.”

“I talk with my cheerleading coach about what to do about my coaching the mini team, the team that I am on and things that we do out of practice.”

“In my class, I am able to build relationships with my classmates off of similarities and differences by talking with them.”

Children and Youth Learning & Play Model

Be Present recognizes and prioritizes children and youth as leaders in the education ecosystem. Through intentional engagement of children and youth, we ensure the work being done is not only “for” youth, but “by youth” – inclusive of youth voice, perspective and leadership. Children and youth bring new ideas and energy – and we need it.

Since its inception, Be Present, Inc. has utilized a whole-organization approach to youth development, engaging children, youth and adults in a co-learning process in all trainings, community organizing and governance through our ***Children and Youth Learning & Play Model (CYLP)***, and aligned with the organization’s Creativity and Play strategic direction.

Guiding Principles

The CYLP’s guiding principles elevate *learning* and *play* as integral and interconnected. Creative learning empowers people to imagine how the world could be different and gives us the confidence and motivation to make positive change happen. Play is the way people of all ages and cultures discover, create and communicate.

- Learning begins with creative play.
- Creativity builds self-esteem, a necessary ingredient for success.
- Support and celebrate the natural creativity within each person.
- Play is a major driver of innovation.
- Sustainable, innovative solutions are needed to address local and global socioeconomic challenges.
- Children are our next generation of leaders and encouraged to develop and communicate their ideas and views.

Youth Voice & Leadership

Children and youth are trainers and facilitators of the Be Present Empowerment Model® and serve in a range of leadership capacities including:

- Facilitation of a Be Present Peer Support Group®, meeting monthly with two other youth to discuss and work through any issues that have an impact on their academic-intellectual, social, emotional, and relational needs.
- Pre-teen advisors on the Board of Directors, learning and contributing their perspectives on local and national initiatives.
- Members of the Children and Youth Learning & Play team, developing curriculum that engages diverse people and learning styles; and bringing this model to local schools.
- Members of community cohorts that design and facilitate monthly leadership development trainings in communities throughout the U.S.
- Leadership team members that design and facilitate all Be Present leadership network convenings, trainings, programs and events.
- Leadership team members that design and facilitate family engagement trainings including *Be Present Family Camp*, *Be Present Family Day*.
- Co-facilitation of Be Present Family Support groups, connecting youth with adults/caregivers in homes, providing intentional time for each person to check in about any issues that have an impact on school, work or home-life, identify supports, as well as celebrate successes and lessons learned.

Youth-Adult Partnerships

Youth-adult partnershipsⁱⁱⁱ (Y-APs) are increasingly emphasized as a key strategy for youth development; according to recent studies they are considered most optimal for adolescent health and empowerment. They are conceptualized as a way for youth and adults to work collaboratively for program or community action, where both have the potential to contribute to decision-making processes, learn from one another, and promote change. In the context of the education ecosystem the youth-adult partnership is a powerful strategy in creating innovative, inclusive solutions and actions.

Y-APs are not a new concept, especially for Be Present and, while this practice already has been a pillar of Be Present since its inception, studies in recent years reveal new insights about what makes Y-APs most effective. The CYLP model fosters youth-adult partnerships through creating intentional opportunities for everyone to collaborate, use skills, make decisions, learn from each other and carry out tasks to reach common goals.

Y-AP in Practice^{iv}

Partnership Strategy	Be Present Practice
Take time to get to know each person – interests and things they care about	Youth identify committees and tasks where they have interest or passion (communications, fundraising, technology, among others)
Communicate and practice the belief that everyone is a leader	Youth and adults are supported equally to step into their leadership; everyone expresses leadership differently and all styles are honored.
Provide relevant, real-life opportunities to lead	Every opportunity to lead – from welcoming new participants –to co-leading a training - is valued.
Provide youth with authentic decision-making power	Youth serve as advisors to the board, community cohorts, and committee members. Youth input is included in all decisions.
Foster a learning community in which youth and adults work together	Youth and adults work and learn from each other at all levels of the organization.
Give progressive support to build leadership	The <i>Be Present Buddy System</i> pairs youth and adults to gain experience and learn skills as they take on new leadership roles.
Model the way and provide opportunities to practice	Consistent practice of the BPEM ensures that youth and adults are continuously learning from each other. Adults demonstrate transparency in their learning.

Programs & Timeline

The *Effecting Achievement and Equity in Education Initiative* spans five years and encompasses a range of hands-on learning experiences and leadership development training in the Be Present Empowerment Model® for children, youth and adults.

- **Leadership Development Sessions | November 2019 to April 2020:** Interactive sessions led by children-youth-adult cohorts that infuse learning, play and creativity with skill building.
 - Atlanta, Georgia – November 9, 2019
 - New York – February 2020
 - San Francisco Bay Area – April 4, 2020
- **Be Present in Guatemala | May 2019 - June 2020:** Initiated by a youth leader in partnership with her Grandmother, she brought her leadership skills in the BPEM® to her school, *Escuela Caracol, an Intercultural Waldorf School* (www.escuelacaracol.org) located in the valley of San Marcos La Laguna in the department of Sololá, Guatemala. The foundation of Waldorf education lies in providing the right experience at the right time and the development of the whole child – the physical, the emotional and the cognitive, making *Escuela Caracol* an excellent partner with Be Present’s holistic education initiative. *Escuela Caracol* strives for an intercultural partnership between the indigenous and non-indigenous families that make up the Lake Atitlán community, acknowledging the modern, globalized world while also honoring local Maya traditions. *Escuela Caracol* is founded on the belief that this partnership has something unique and important to offer to the world.

A cohort of 10 youth and 10 adult trainers from the San Francisco Bay Area and Atlanta are co-designing and leading a bilingual, interactive leadership training for children, youth and adults at *Escuela Caracol*. The cohort is convening monthly virtual sessions over 12 months which include learning about the history of Guatemala and indigenous people in the area, Waldorf philosophy, the Spanish language, training design, materials preparation, and fundraising, among other preparations.

- **Be Present Training Institute for Effecting Achievement and Equity in Education | November 2020 – May 2022:** Intensive training series of six 4-day sessions held over an 18-month period with participants representing a microcosm of the education ecosystem from public, private and charter schools and their parents and families; as well as educators, youth-serving professionals, faith and community leaders.
- **Effecting Achievement and Equity in Education Conference | September 2022:** At the conclusion of the Training Institute, which the participants (now trained facilitators in the Model®) organize and facilitate a conference; facilitators share their experiences, lessons learned, and outcomes. Upon completion, this pilot program is evaluated and refined before moving into full implementation in diverse communities throughout the state, region, and country.

Be Present Youth Leaders

Nolan Allen



10-year old boy, mixed African American and white, student at International Community School; Youth Advisor, Board of Directors, Be Present, Inc.

Global Citizen Award (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018), Class President, High performing student (received A's in all subjects 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018), Captain, DDYSC Wolves 08 Elite Academy Soccer Team, Peer Coach, Kindergarten ICS Soccer Team. I like that I am athletic. I like that I play sports. I like that I am kind. I am a good friend. I can check on you and make sure you are okay when something is wrong.

I came to Be Present when I was in my Mom's stomach. I went to my first training when I was 2 ½ months old. I like this part of the Be Present Vision Statement "We are committed to a process that builds personal and community well-being on the strength of self-knowledge rather than on the distress of oppression." I like this because it shows how you can help the community and be bonded with all of your neighbors and community.

Ryanne Lowe



12-year old girl, African-American-Jamaican, student at Columbia Middle School – STEM Magnet Program; Youth Advisor, Board of Directors, Be Present, Inc.

Honor Roll (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018), Principal's List (2016, 2017), Reading Award (2012-2017), Captain, Columbia Middle School Cheer Team, 2018 Best All-Around Cheerleader, Team member, YMCA Elite All-Stars Level 2 & 3. I love to tumble. I love to dance. I love that I can cook. I love that I can do hair. I love that I am smart. I love that I am a good cheerleader. I love that I like money. I love that I like candy and food. I love my hair.

I came to Be Present 12 years ago when I was a baby at Black & Female. The first paragraph in the vision statement speaks to me, "We are a diverse network of people willing to risk being different with one another, our families, communities, workplaces and organizations." It speaks to me because it means we are different and we can use that difference to make relationships.

Jordan Plum



11-year old boy, African American, student at Raskob Day School, a nationally renowned school for neural atypical learners where I am supported and thriving; Board Member, Board of Directors, Be Present, Inc.

Basketball player for Redwood Heights and Oakland Rebels (Regional Champions), advanced red belt in taekwondo at Superior Marital Arts. I love that I am a good friend. I help people if someone is having a hard time or being bullied. I love that I am fast and strong.

I want people to know that I am dyslexic and it takes me a while to read things. I am on the National Board of Be Present. I decided to join when I was 10 because I love to travel to different places and I love Be Present and teaching about Be Present.

D’Nur Sanford

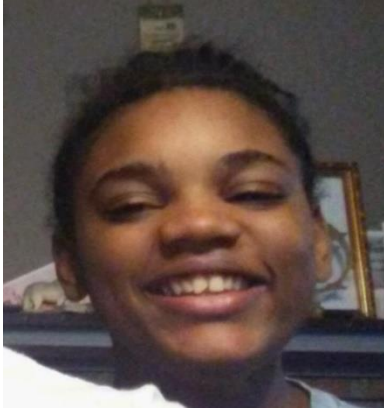


13-year old boy, Native American, student, Wesley International School; Youth Advisor, Board of Directors, Be Present, Inc.

Student of the Month (2015), A & B Honor Roll (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015), Georgia Tech Award for Spanish, Georgia Tech Scholarship to attend Spanish Classes, performing artist.

I first came to Be Present when I was seven. It’s hard having a voice in school. Because in school it is so quick to fighting, going back and forth and things that are so irrelevant to a point. What happened to having a voice and what happen to apologizing some time? It is a difference. The reason I say it, is that the situation is so appropriate for having a voice - because we are young individuals. Everything might not go my way, but I believe that if you have a voice and you can be able to speak, it is really supportive.

Israel Sanford



11-year old girl, African American, student, Michael Hollis Academy; Youth Advisor, Board of Directors, Be Present, Inc., performing artist.

I first came to Be Present when I was five. What I like about Be Present is the people feeling that they are in relationships and comfortable - that people feel safeness. The comfortableness is because people can feel they can be comfortable sharing anything. The relationship just make me feel happy to see one person getting to know another person and they feel a powerful unbreakable relationship.

SOURCES

ⁱ Extracted and adapted from ASCD's Whole Child approach www.acsd.org
Whole child approaches might also be referred to as community school strategies, integrated student supports, wrap-around services, or school-linked services.

ⁱⁱ The Equity Assistance Centers. (2013). How the Common Core must ensure equity by fully preparing every student for postsecondary success: Recommendations from the Regional Equity Assistance Centers on implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

ⁱⁱⁱ Balancing power in communities of practice: An examination of increasing student voice through school-based youth–adult partnerships, *Jones & Perkins 2004*

^{iv} Balancing power in communities of practice: An examination of increasing student voice through school-based youth–adult partnerships, *Jones & Perkins 2004*