

Article Summary/Overview

“Addressing the Hole in Whole Child Education”

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WHY PUBLIC SCHOOLS NEED TO ENGAGE THE SPIRITUAL SIDE OF STUDENTS AND HOW TO DO IT WITHOUT MIXING CHURCH AND STATE

*“Denying or ignoring the spiritual needs of adolescents may end up creating a void in their lives that either devolves into **depression** or is filled by other forms of **questing and challenge**, such as **drinking, unbridled consumerism, petty crime, sexual precocity, or flirtations with violence** [emphasis added].” ~ “Hardwired to Connect”*

More and more educators are seeing the importance of addressing not only the intellectual and physical needs of students but also their emotional, social, and health needs. However, what is missing in the current dialogue about “Whole Child Education” are ideas for addressing the spiritual needs of students.

We confuse knowing something — getting the answer right [or scores against academic standards] — **with understanding its meaning for shaping their lives**. To do that requires examining it through the lens of their **values and beliefs**. This often involves students’ **religious faith**. [Emphases added.]

ENGAGEMENT OF RELIGION AS AN ACADEMIC ASSET

Welcoming and engaging students’ deepest beliefs as they apply to learning is academically helpful and can be done in ways that are very appropriate for public schools:

1. Supportive of academic goals
2. Supportive of college-readiness
3. Supportive of Twenty-first century skills
4. Culturally relevant and responsive
5. Legally balanced

1. SUPPORTIVE OF ACADEMIC GOALS

Research has shown that religion has a positive effect on academic achievement among students.

- **Higher GPAs (Grade Point Averages):** “Students who practice their religion on a regular basis have an average GPA of 3.21 compared to 2.92 for those with no religion.” (Stanford University’s Graduate School of Education)
- **The single most important factor that REDUCES THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP for all students: Black, Latino, male, female—regardless of mother’s education level or income:** (*Researcher, Ilana Horwitz; Dr. Willem Jeynes’* meta-analysis of thirty studies involving over 1 million students 2; University of *Notre Dame’s Institute for Latino Studies* published a report entitled “Religion Matters: Predicting School Success among Latino Youth,” 4; and “The Role of Religion in Promoting Academic Success for Black Students” 5)

2. SUPPORTIVE OF COLLEGE READINESS

Education Levels Achieved

Religious involvement plays a significant role in educational attainment. Researchers analyzed data from over 8,000 students and reported:

*“The effects of religious involvement on college enrollment are quite similar to those of high school completion. Any religious affiliation increased the odds of college enrollment compared to being unaffiliated.... [emphasis added]”*⁶

Similarly, in her report “Does Church Attendance Really Increase Schooling?” Linda D. Loury of Tufts University concluded that “**religiosity during adolescence has a significant effect** on total number of **years of schooling attained** [emphasis added].”⁷

3. SUPPORTS TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SKILLS

Incorporating faith-friendly policies and practices will also have a positive effect on skills students need for twenty-first century learning, such as:

- The student assumes responsibility in collaborative learning
- The student engages in respectful team work
- The student uses information ethically
- The student demonstrates positive social skills.

For students with religious backgrounds, their faith traditions support these positive attributes.

4. CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND RESPONSIVE

There are two institutions in every community that have the most influence on the development of children: schools and churches. [Therefore, active **acceptance** of the **role of**

religion in students' lives is **culturally relevant** and **responsive**. Why?] Schools are filled with churchgoing people. In polling done by the Barna Group it was discovered that:

- “84% of churchgoing parents send their children to public schools”
- “Nearly half of the nation's public educators are practicing Christians...”⁹

We do students a grave disservice when we do not encourage them to integrate what they at least claim is important in their lives with how they actually live their lives.

In its report, *Hardwired to Connect*, the panel of medical doctors and researchers from Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, UCLA, and Columbia warned:

“Denying or ignoring the spiritual needs of adolescents may end up creating a void in their lives that either devolves into depression or is filled by other forms of questing and challenge, such as drinking, unbridled consumerism, petty crime, sexual precocity, or flirtations with violence [emphasis added].”¹³

The report concluded:

“We recommend that youth-serving organizations purposively seek to promote the moral and spiritual development of children, recognizing that children’s moral and spiritual needs are as genuine, and as integral to their personhood, as their physical and intellectual needs.... [emphasis added]”¹⁴

5. LEGALLY BALANCED

The biggest objection from educators is that addressing religion in public schools is illegal. They assume it violates the “separation of church and state.” [T]his...has led teachers to do exactly the opposite of what is good for students’ development.

Both Supreme Court rulings and guidelines from the U.S. Department of Education support freedom of religious expression—NOT absolute “separation of church and state.” For example, the Supreme Court commented in *Lynch v Donnelley* that:

The Constitution does not require complete separation of church and state [emphasis added]; it affirmatively mandates accommodation, not merely tolerance, of all religions, and forbids hostility toward any [emphasis added].

The *U.S. Department of Education* lists 5 points to clarify students’ freedom of religious expression that include: “talk[ing] about their faith at school” and “express[ing] their faith in their class work and homework.” (See article for full listing.)

Note: For footnotes, see the full article (<https://tinyurl.com/yxfkrrnx>)