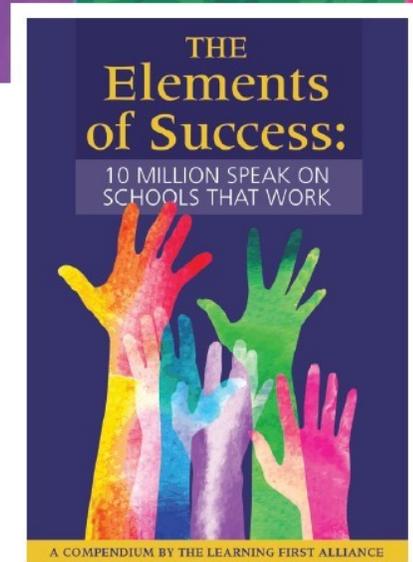


# Focus on the Total Child

**W**hat do successful schools look like? There is no one answer. Each successful school reflects the beliefs and character of its community, and each addresses the needs of its students in its own way. However, in *The Elements of Success: 10 Million Speak on Schools That Work*, the Learning First Alliance identifies six elements common to all successful schools. Members of the Alliance, who represent more than 10 million educators, parents and local policymakers, agree these are the factors needed for a school to perform at a high level and help all students succeed, while understanding these elements don't look the same in each school. How they are achieved and integrated depends greatly on context.



One of these elements is a focus on the total child.

What does that mean? Successful schools support all students' needs, inside and outside the classroom, to help them become effective, empowered learners. They design and carry out programs that offer all students a rich educational experience, supporting their academic and social/emotional learning and physical development so they develop the skills needed to succeed in an ever-changing environment. These schools customize learning to individual students, taking advantage of advances in technology as they do so. They also provide opportunities for students to explore careers and nurture their talents and interests.

Here, the instructional aspects of this focus are emphasized. Other elements address additional issues that a focus on the total child includes.

- **Standards:** Successful schools provide good instruction based on state standards for student learning that define the knowledge and skills essential for college and career readiness. These standards emphasize deep understanding of subject matter, critical thinking and problem solving. They foster interdisciplinary instruction with purposeful connections across subject areas.
  - **Curriculum and pedagogy:** In successful schools, teachers use effective curriculum (*what* they teach) and pedagogy (*how* they teach) to lead students toward the standards they are expected to reach. Such a curriculum is a tool that supports instruction – it does not drive it. Such a pedagogy includes techniques and strategies known to contribute to learning.
  - **Assessment:** Successful schools consider the multiple goals of assessment, including accountability, informing instruction and continuous improvement of both educators and students, and use the right tool for the right purpose. They get clear and timely information about student performance. Rather than waiting for a final, summative score, these schools use formative assessments to continuously inform instruction. They also use a range of information about student abilities and do not rely on test scores alone to drive their work.
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- **Individualized learning:** Successful schools recognize that, although all students should be held to the same expectations for learning, each student starts at a different place and has a unique way of learning and distinct interests. They customize learning to individual students, for example, using tiered systems of intervention to address the needs of those at risk of falling behind, engaging in culturally sensitive teaching or adjusting the pace at which material is covered. One major aspect of individualized learning involves special education. In successful schools, individualized education programs (IEPs) and the entire special education program are constantly evaluated and modified to meet each child's needs.
  - **Integrated use of technology:** Successful schools integrate technology into instruction across the curriculum, driven by learning objectives. These schools make this technology accessible to all students, and they ensure students use it appropriately. They are guided by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards for Students, which are designed to empower student voice and ensure learning is a student-driven process.
  - **Social/emotional learning:** Successful schools incorporate social/emotional learning (SEL) throughout their buildings. In doing so, they are guided by agreed-upon definitions, standards and competencies, developed by experts, such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). In these schools, this work is considered essential, and every adult – administrators, teachers, coaches, school counselors, parent leaders and other stakeholders – understands and is engaged in it every day.

In their efforts to support all students' needs, educators, parents and local communities work together to develop programs to meet their specific goals based on their unique strengths. But while the strategies used vary, all successful schools focus on the total child.

Of course, just because a school has such a focus doesn't mean that it will thrive; it is a necessary, but not sufficient, factor in success. For example, a school that focuses on the total child but has poor leadership or lacks family and community engagement will struggle. True success requires all six elements of successful schools:

- Focus on the Total Child
- Commitment to Equity and Access
- Family and Community Engagement
- Distributed Leadership
- Strong, Supported Teaching Force and Staff
- Relationship-Oriented School Climate

*To learn more and read the full report or executive summary, visit <https://learningfirst.org/elementsofsuccess>.*

## Learning First Alliance Members

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education; AASA, The School Superintendents Association; American Federation of Teachers; American School Counselor Association; Consortium for School Networking; Learning Forward; National Association of Elementary School Principals; National Association of Secondary School Principals; National Education Association; National PTA; National School Boards Association; National School Public Relations Association