

Educate the Whole Child
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**Mission Hill School Receives National Recognition as a
Whole Child Certified School**

Mission Hill has long been known for its extraordinary attention to helping individual children reach their highest potential. The school that began in Roxbury and is now in Jamaica Plain has attracted international attention for its distinctive approach for instilling in children a love of learning aimed to carry through into adulthood. As the evaluator who visited the school as part of the Whole Child Certification process wrote in his report, “This learning environment deserves special recognition because it has been achieved despite formidable challenges, especially in the area of funding for Special Education services. Programmatic excellence and pedagogical expertise is evident throughout the school.” He goes on to say that the positive learning climate is evident in student behavior, teachers’ professionalism, and parent involvement.

Now the school has received a certification that honors the school. At the same time this recognition adds visibility and momentum to efforts that seek to replace the nationwide public school emphasis on accountability, standardization, and testing, with a paradigm stressing effective measures to teach the whole child. Achievement is important, but brain research now confirms that students learn and retain more when more parts of the brain become engaged. This can happen with hands-on projects, connecting children with their community, multi-age classes, more individualized and active learning, and other strategies that break the mold of conventional teaching.

The certification has been conferred by *Educate the Whole Child*, a Massachusetts-based initiative of the Myrin Institute, and culminates an accreditation-like process that has taken more than a year. What does “Educate the Whole Child” mean? As detailed on the website www.educatethewholechild.org, the organization maintains that the narrow

pursuit of academic achievement as reflected on tests has caused schools to lose sight of the overall purpose of education—to grow the child into a caring, balanced, capable adult. “What is the point of having stratospheric scores on high-stakes tests if one can’t construct a fulfilled life or be a good citizen and parent?” asks Co-Director Christopher Nye. There are many paths to the goal of a balanced, holistic education, but ETWC recommends that students be engaged in five different strands as they come up through the grades.

1. Intellectual/cognitive work (the right brain)
2. Creative/artistic work (the left brain)
3. Disciplined physical movement, or with the youngest—free play
4. Work with the hands, projects, experiments, demonstrations
5. Commitment to nature and community.

In each of these five dimensions or strands, schools need to attend to children’s social and emotional development. This way we engage the head, the heart, and the hands, and celebrate the kind of instruction children receive at Mission Hill, now an Whole Child Certified School.

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