

## Chapter 6

# The Culturally Connected School Counselor: Best Practices and Considerations

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this chapter is to facilitate knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to cultural awareness and multicultural competence for professional school counselors (PSCs) who serve various stakeholders in K-12 schools (students, teachers, administrators, staff, caregivers, and community members). While reading the chapter, PSCs will assess their own self-awareness and understanding related to their own multifaceted cultural identities and consider cultural intersections with, and differences from, those they serve. As a result of this exploration, they will be better able to plan culturally alert interventions at a myriad of levels with; individuals, small groups, classrooms, and school wide. Furthermore, by developing a keen social justice lens they will increase their ability to recognize oppression in K-12 school; be better equipped to facilitate dialogue between various groups; plan culturally aware interventions with students, staff, and community; and engage in advocacy on various levels (individual, system, and public arenas) to create systemic change.*

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to facilitate knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to cultural awareness and multicultural competence for professional school counselors (PSCs) who serve various stakeholders in K-12 schools (students, teachers, administrators, staff, caregivers, and community members). The term school counselor and Professional School Counselor (PSC) are synonymous, albeit the latter is professionally preferred, and will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter. While reading the

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chapter, PSCs will assess their own self-awareness and understanding related to their own multifaceted cultural identities and consider cultural intersections with and differences from those they serve. As a result of this exploration, they will be better able to plan culturally alert interventions at a myriad of levels with; individuals, small groups, classrooms, and school-wide. Furthermore, by developing a keen social justice lens they will increase their ability to recognize oppression in K-12 schools, be better equipped to facilitate dialogue between various groups, plan culturally aware interventions with students, staff, and community, and engage in advocacy on various levels (individual, system, and public arenas) to create systemic change.

## **BACKGROUND**

Public K-12 education is experiencing an expected, yet dynamic demographic shift. As teachers and helping professionals we must be aware and rise to the occasion to meet the needs of increasingly diverse students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups* report (2018), between 2000 and 2017 the percentage of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools who were White decreased from 62% to 51%. They go on to report in 2015-16, the number of students ages 3-21 receiving special education services was 6.7 million, accounting for approximately 13% of all public-school students. The percentage of public-school students in the United States who were English Language Learners (ELL) rose to 9.9%, with individual states reporting increases as high as 21% (NCES, 2018). The percentage of public-school students living in poverty was about 19%, with racial/ ethnic minorities reporting much higher rates, 34% for Black and Hispanic students and 28% Hispanic students (NCES, 2018). Finally, while conditions have improved for LGBTQ+ students in schools, 95% have experienced anti-LGBTQ remarks at school, 35% have missed all or part of a school day, 43% have avoided bathrooms, and 40% have avoided locker rooms (Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2018). School counselors must remember that many students in public-education today will fall into one or more of these visible or less visible cultural groups.

Marginal status in one or more cultural groups coupled with environmental factors (poverty, homelessness, neglect, access to health care) can lead to an inequitable and uneven K-12 landscape (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Dahir & Stone, 2012). These factors are further compounded and often seen in conjunction with an increased need for youth mental health and general counseling services. Over the past 20 years, scholars and research agencies reported a rise in prevalence and persistence of mental health diagnoses among school-age youth (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998; Lockhart & Keys, 1998; Merikangas et al., 2010; Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Rohini, & Goel, 2011). According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in concordance with data from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) one in every five youth ages 13-18 has or will have a serious mental illness, mood disorder, behavior or conduct disorder, or anxiety disorder. PSCs are specially equipped through their training to work with students in a culturally sensitive fashion to mitigate the impact of systemic, environmental, and mental health stressors on social/emotional well-being, academic performance, and career aspirations (Holcombe-McCoy, Harris, Hines, & Johnston, 2008; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010; Pica-Smith & Poynton, 2014). “As public schools in the United States become more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse, it becomes even more important that professional school counselors be able to address equity and to effectively work with diverse students and parents” (Holcombe-McCoy et al., 2008, p. 172). Due

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