Chapter 1
Achievement in Urban Schools:
Linking Schools, Families, and Communities

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to give the readers a context for which to understand academic achievement in urban schools. The authors also provide an overview of the role of schools, families, and communities in the education of urban school students. This chapter will also highlight recommendations for school counselors and for counselor educators responsible for training school counselors. The authors convey the importance of schools, families, and communities working together to give all students optimal learning experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Urban education is a method of schooling that takes place in large, densely populated areas with diverse students. One out of four American children attends school in an urban setting, and in urban schools, where students are twice as likely to suffer from poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). With that being said, students in urban school settings encounter unique challenges (e.g., family concerns, limited access to healthcare, crime/violence) that impact their educational experience (Holcomb-McCoy & Gonzalez, 2016). **School counselors**, in turn, play an important role in an urban school setting because they are called upon by their profession to be advocates, leaders, collaborators, and consultants

who create systemic change that promotes equitable educational access and student success (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019).

Our purpose is to explain ways in which **school counselors** in urban settings can work with schools, families, and communities to enhance achievement. We give readers an overview of **urban education**, the role of schools, families, and communities in urban school settings, and finally offer implications for **school counselors** and counselor educators. Linking schools, families, and communities are important roles for **school counselors** (ASCA, 2016a*).* This information is particularly important to counselor educators because it is with their guidance and support that **school counselors** learn to form, lead, facilitate, and evaluate these partnerships and work to remove barriers that impede these helpful collaborative relationships (ASCA, 2016d). Counselor educators also ensure **school counselors** who will work in urban school settings are equipped to establish and maintain a program that addresses students' academic achievement, career planning, and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2019). Adequate training can yield more academic successes for students and foster healthy relationships with their families and communities. Another reason why the information in this chapter is so vital is that **school counselors** are held responsible for demonstrating school counselor competencies across school setting types, including urban school districts (Hannon, 2016). With students coming from diverse backgrounds, **school counselors** are charged with developing comprehensive school counseling programs to address the myriad of needs students have when they come to school.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Urban Education

The mission of schools within the United States is to ensure students are meeting state learning standards, to close the **achievement gaps** of students from culturally diverse backgrounds, and to ensure that progress is being made (Hanover Research, 2017). Additionally, the United States Department of Education (2011) suggested that their mission entails providing all students equal access to excellent education thereby promoting academic achievement and global competitiveness. Schools situated in urban districts face many challenges that are unique to the urban school setting.

A number of other structural and systemic issues exist – all of which give scholars assistance in understanding the **achievement gap**. Addressing deficiencies in urban school settings has been documented in education scholarship (Deeds & Pattillo, 2014; Noguera & Wells, 2011; Owens et al., 2011; Snyder & Reckhow, 2017). Examples include persistently low student achievement, inexperienced teaching staff, and low expectations of students (Bloom & Owens, 2013; Eckert, 2013; Torres, 2016). The racial and socio-economic injustices in urban schools have also been widely discussed in the literature. Many of these struggles are largely external and involve issues such as poverty, family structure, community violence, and instructional quality (Chung, 2011; Lee, 2005).

Schools in urban school districts tend to serve students from low-income families, and these schools have a disproportionate number of inadequate resources such as textbooks and data management systems (Synder & Reckhow, 2017). **School counselors** need to examine the historical barriers in order to contest the misconception that urban school children are underachievers. Systemic racism, for instance, is deeply rooted in American history, culture, and institutions (Ogbu, 1986). While there have been many attempts to reform education at all levels in the United States over time, it has been difficult to eliminate

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