

# TOUCH THE FUTURE...TEACH!

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# 3

## Students in Today's Classrooms

Who am I?



What  
do I  
believe?

### THINK ABOUT THIS:

When you become a teacher, you likely will feel fairly comfortable with those students in your class who share all or most of the characteristics

“What we want is to see the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child.”

George Bernard Shaw (playwright)

you had as a student. But what about the rest of the class? How will you connect with them in order to ensure that ALL your students will be motivated to “pursue” knowledge?

Acquiring significant knowledge about your students’ backgrounds will allow you to make the types of human connections that will enhance your students’ learning. What do you think teachers can do to “reach” all students in their classes? Why might it be

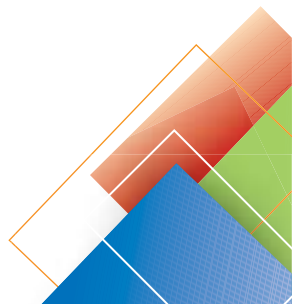
important to understand the cultural, family, and individual backgrounds of students in order to teach effectively?



**T**his chapter addresses the nature of the population of students in elementary and secondary schools in the United States. It explores the changes in the student population as well as challenges and circumstances faced by students in U.S. schools. Different categories of students will be analyzed and school practices will be examined in terms of how they impact different students. As you read this chapter, you will explore some key questions about today's students.

### KEY QUESTIONS

1. What social changes are affecting school demographics?
2. Is education equitable for all students?
3. Are student accountability and equity complementary or competing interests?
4. What educational options are best for racial and language minority students?



## WHAT SOCIAL CHANGES ARE AFFECTING SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS?

Throughout the history of the United States, one thing that has always been constant about the country is that “nothing is constant.” As a society, we are in a perpetual state of flux, with people migrating from one part of the country to another, as well as a steady flow of immigrants arriving from throughout the world, all in an effort to seek out better life opportunities. What has changed over the years is where these new immigrants come from and the effect this movement has on the social structure of the country, including the country’s educational system.

### DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS IN THE STUDENT POPULATION

The general population of students in the public schools in the United States is increasing in numbers and diversity. In 1988, 45.4 million students attended U.S. public schools. By 2001, that figure had grown to 53.9 million and by the year 2013, the U.S. student population is expected to be around 56.4 million, an increase of around 5 percent. While this increase shows healthy growth, it is a much more modest increase than the 19 percent growth public schools experienced between 1988 and 2001, a growth partly explained by the children of the baby boom generation sometimes referred to as the “baby boom echo.”

The number of high school graduates has increased from 2.8 million (2.5 million public and .27 million private) in 1988 to 2.9 million (2.6 million public and .28 million private) in 2001 and is expected to climb to 3.2 million in 2013 (2.8 million public and .33 million private) (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). It is evident from these figures that the increasing number of students in the United States makes education a growth field for the foreseeable future. It is equally evident that public schools will be responsible for 85 to 90 percent of high school graduates.

While the influx of immigrants and the effects of the baby boom echo help to explain the overall growth in the student population, the numbers become more interesting when we look at another characteristic of contemporary life in the United States: mobility. Approximately three million children are born in the United States each year, but in the

same period of time, up to 40 million Americans move. Although most migration occurs within the same state, six to eight million people move from one state to another each year (Hodgkinson, 2000/2001).

Student populations are projected to increase in 30 states, with Alaska (17 percent), Hawaii (16 percent), and California (16 percent) expecting the greatest increases; while 20 states are projected to lose students with the greatest decreases expected to occur in West Virginia (6 percent) and Kentucky (6 percent) (Gerald and Hussar, 2003).

Regionally, the U.S. Department of Education (2004) estimates that between 2003 and 2013, the greatest increase in public school enrollment grades pre-K to 12 will take place in the West. Over this same period, enrollment is expected to decrease in the Northeast, remain relatively stable in the Midwest, and increase slightly in the South. Of course the specific impact on the schools of a region depends largely on where they are located. For example, schools in Las Vegas, Nevada and

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### Themes of the Times

Expand your knowledge of the concepts discussed in this chapter by reading current and historical articles from the *New York Times* by visiting the “Themes of the Times” section of the Companion Website.



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*Schools throughout the United States reflect the changing ethnic demographics of communities. The 2000 census indicated that Hispanics was the fastest growing sector of the population. How do you think this growth will affect decision making in education?*

**TABLE 3.1**

**Percentage distribution of public school students enrolled in grades K-12 who were minorities: October 1972–2000**

OCTOBER	WHITE	TOTAL	MINORITY ENROLLMENT		
			BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER
1972	77.8	22.2	14.8	6.0	1.4
1973	78.1	21.9	14.7	5.7	1.4
1974	76.8	23.2	15.4	6.3	1.5
1975	76.2	23.8	15.4	6.7	1.7
1976	76.2	23.8	15.5	6.5	1.7
1977	76.1	23.9	15.8	6.2	1.9
1978	75.5	24.5	16.0	6.5	2.1
1979	75.8	24.2	15.7	6.6	1.9
1980	72.8	27.2	16.2	8.6	2.4
1981	72.4	27.6	16.0	8.7	2.9
1982	71.9	28.1	16.0	8.9	3.2
1983	71.3	28.7	16.1	9.2	3.4
1984	71.7	28.3	16.1	8.5	3.6
1985	69.6	30.4	16.8	10.1	3.5
1986	69.1	30.9	16.6	10.8	3.6
1987	68.5	31.5	16.6	10.8	4.0
1988	68.3	31.7	16.5	11.0	4.2
1989	68.0	32.0	16.6	11.4	4.0
1990	67.6	32.4	16.5	11.7	4.2
1991	67.1	32.9	16.8	11.8	4.2
1992	66.8	33.3	16.9	12.1	4.3
1993	67.0	33.0	16.6	12.1	4.3
1994	65.8	34.2	16.7	13.7	3.8
1995	65.5	34.5	16.9	14.1	3.5
1996	63.7	36.3	16.6	14.5	5.3
1997	63.0	37.0	16.9	14.9	5.1
1998	62.4	37.6	17.2	15.4	5.1
1999	61.9	38.1	16.5	16.2	5.5
2000	61.3	38.7	16.6	16.6	5.4

*Note:* Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding. See *Supplemental Note 1* for information on the racial/ethnic categories.

*Source:* U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. October Population Surveys, 1972–2000.

Fort Lauderdale, Florida have experienced rapid enrollment growth in recent years, a trend likely to continue for a while. Schools in rural Montana or the Dakotas, on the other hand, have seen declining numbers of students. So besides differences in the increase or decrease of the student population in different regions of the nation, there can be significant variations within each region.



## Problems to POSSIBILITIES

### Improving Attendance at Washington Middle

#### Case Study

*Tenika Jones is a seventh-grade English teacher at Washington Middle School in a large northeastern city in the United States. She is in her third year of teaching and she is very dedicated to her inner-city students. Tenika is often disheartened because, on any given school day, about one quarter of her students are absent. She is also aware that the absence level in her English classes is slightly below the overall average for Washington Middle School. She worries that teaching language skills requires students to build on earlier skills and when students are absent often, they do not understand instructions that build on lessons they missed. She talks to other English teachers as well as teachers of other subjects and they are also having similar problems with absences.*

#### Discussion Question

What suggestions do you have for Tenika and her fellow teachers at Washington Middle to improve attendance?

#### Possibilities

Tenika took the following steps to turn a problem into a possibility.

*Tenika met with the three other seventh-grade English teachers to brainstorm this issue. They decided that perhaps some tangible incentives for middle schoolers to come to school might help. They created a plan which they named "Attendance for School Success" and took it to their principal for discussion and approval. The principal agreed to the plan and Tenika and her fellow teachers went to local merchants asking them to donate items (movie tickets, coupons for food or small gift certificates) to be given to students in a raffle at the end of every grading period. In order to enter the raffle, a student could not miss more than 10 percent of classes in the grading period. After two marking periods under the "Attendance for School Success" plan the overall absence rate at Washington Middle had been reduced from 28 percent to 15 percent. While Tenika and her colleagues still want to make it lower, they are happy that their idea is helping students at Washington Middle come to school more often and learn more.*

- Racial and Ethnic Changes** From 2000 to 2010, ethnic groups in the general population are expected to increase across the board: Whites, +5 million; Hispanics, +9 million; African Americans, +3.8 million; Asians, +3.8 million; and Native Americans, +266,000 (Hodgkinson, 1998). As shown in Table 3.1, public schools are much more racially and ethnically diverse today than they were three decades ago. In 1972, White students made up almost 78 percent of the public school student population while African Americans represented almost 15 percent and Hispanics 6 percent. In 2000, Whites represented 61.3 percent of public school students, African Americans were 16.6 percent, and Hispanics were 16.6 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). A longer-term estimate predicts the population of non-Hispanic Whites in U.S. public schools will continue to decline: 2000, 65 percent; 2020, 56 percent; 2040, less than 50 percent (Spring, 2004). While these are significant changes in the student population, no change is felt equally in all schools in this nation. Teachers in urban schools still are more likely than their rural and suburban counterparts to have a more equitable distribution of students who are White, African American, Hispanic, Asian, or immigrants. Nonetheless, data from the 2000 U.S. Census indicate that student populations in suburban, and even rural, areas are generally becoming more diverse.

School districts that receive significant numbers of immigrant children are the ones increasing most in diversity. Historically, 90 percent of immigrants to the United States came from Europe, adding mostly to the nation's White population. Today, however, only



FIGURE 3.1

## High School Dropouts

STATE	TOTAL 9TH-12TH GRADERS	NUMBER OF DROPOUTS	RATE (9TH-12TH)	AMERICAN INDIAN/ ALASKA NATIVE	ASIAN/ PACIFIC ISLANDER	HISPANIC	BLACK, NON- HISPANIC	WHITE, NON- HISPANIC
Alaska	38,914	3,177	8.2	12.7	8.6	11.0	11.4	6.3
Arizona	234,367	25,632	10.9	17.0	5.0	16.8	13.9	7.1
Connecticut	155,731	4,649	3.0	3.7	1.8	7.0	5.3	2.0
Florida	674,817	29,965	4.4	3.9	2.4	5.6	5.9	3.5
Iowa	158,050	4,193	2.7	10.4	2.3	9.1	7.3	2.3
Louisiana	196,040	16,361	8.3	9.7	4.8	8.8	10.8	6.5
New Jersey	351,496	9,882	2.8	12.0	1.0	5.6	5.7	1.6
New York	809,036	30,898	3.8	6.5	2.9	7.2	6.3	2.1
North Dakota	346,424	21,773	6.3	10.0	3.2	3.2	3.9	1.5
Texas	1,116,518	46,973	4.2	5.0	2.2	6.1	5.4	2.5
Wisconsin	259,047	6,002	2.3	5.7	2.4	6.5	9.8	1.4
American Samoa	3,773	73	1.9	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Guam	8,775	1,001	11.4	0.0	6.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Puerto Rico	166,476	1,737	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0

Source: *Projections of Education Statistics to 2013*, National Center for Education Statistics, NCES 2004013, November 2003.

12 percent of immigrants come from Europe (Hodgkinson, 1998). The great majority come from Latin America and Asia, adding mostly to the ranks of students of color. Regardless of where immigrant students originate, many face significant difficulties adapting to life in America and to the American education system. But this challenge can be lessened with knowledgeable and compassionate teachers. More than ever before, teachers need to be aware of their students' backgrounds.

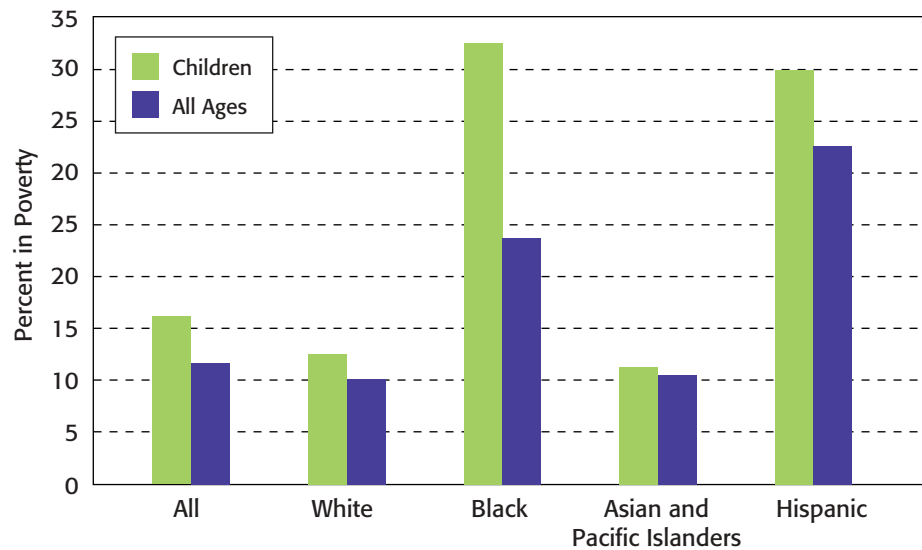
Traditional notions of Black/White diversity in the U.S. population are quickly being replaced with a much more complex mixture of cultures and people, blurring the racial/ethnic backgrounds of students. As the student population changes, however, some of the most rapidly-increasing groups of students are not experiencing the same rates of academic success as their peers. For example, Hispanics represent the most numerous ethnic minority group in the United States, yet the high school dropout rate for Hispanics throughout the country (27 percent) far exceeds that for African American (13 percent) or White (7 percent) students. Many Hispanic students fall behind their peers in elementary school and never catch up (Collison, 1999). Figure 3.1 identifies the projected dropout rates of select ethnic groups in select states. Teachers in the 21st century have to find new ways to reach Hispanic students and English Language Learners.

The changing face of today's classroom serves as a microcosm of the world in general. By 2010, Whites are projected to account for only 9 percent of the world's population, compared to 17 percent in 1997, making them the world's smallest ethnic minority (Hodgkinson, 1998). As a teacher, you will need to prepare your students to understand increasing diversity nationally and internationally.

- **Changes to the Family Environment.** Teachers will continue to teach a significant percentage of students who live in single-parent households, belong to blended families

FIGURE 3.2

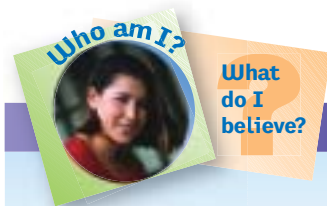
## Children vs. All People In Poverty



Source: Bureau of the Census. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 121st Edition*. Washington DC: 2001. (p. 442).

where one or both parents have gone through divorce, or are being raised by grandparents or legal guardians. Many of the traditional assumptions about children's homes and the support children are able to get with school work must undergo re-examination. The student may or may not have a two parent home, or the parents or guardians may or may not have the skills necessary to assist the student. In such cases, the teacher and the school need to be careful not to draw inferences about parents' concern for the child's education.

The socioeconomic position of students and their families also will continue to be an important variable in the classroom (Figure 3.2). Approximately 20 percent of children in



"When you go out there (to teach) armed with this knowledge and confidence, you ask yourself, what difference have you been able to make for students?"

MIRIAM, ELEMENTARY TEACHER

**THINK ABOUT THIS:**

Given the evolving nature of students in today's classroom, write down three important things a good teacher can do, in addition to subject matter instruction, to help students succeed.

**SHARE and COMPARE:**

Ask a classmate to list three answers to the question above and compare responses. How many of your answers are the same? Discuss with your classmate why he/she chose those answers and share your reasons for your responses.



the United States live below the poverty line, exactly the same percentage as 15 years ago (Hodgkinson, 2000/2001). Teachers in the United States will continue to teach the highest proportion of students living in poverty of any major Western industrialized nation. Some teachers, particularly those in inner-city and rural settings, have considerably more than one-fifth of their students living below the poverty line.

## SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

In spite of the intent to “treat all children equally” and efforts of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 to level the playing field for all students, social problems affecting America’s youth can have a significant impact on academic achievement. By requiring schools to report results on annual standardized tests for each segment of the student population, NCLB helps identify poorly performing groups of students and issues that may need to be addressed. But not all schools face the same social problems to the same degree, a factor not reflected in the NCLB legislation. Although performance is partly a function of individual ability, social problems such as substance abuse, truancy, teen pregnancy, violence in the home or society, and poverty are examples of circumstances faced by U.S. students that can inhibit academic achievement. When students are exposed to these factors, even those students with high academic ability, low school performance is likely to result. Figure 3.3 identifies the prevalence of certain behaviors that place today’s students at risk.

In general, the severity of problems decreases from urban to suburban and from suburban to rural schools, with two exceptions—drug and alcohol abuse. Teachers in all three

**FIGURE 3.3**

### Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

To monitor the priority health-risk behaviors of young people, the Centers for Disease Control developed the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) beginning in 1990. The 2003 survey of high school students reported they had:

Rarely or never worn a seat belt	18.2%
Rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol during the 30 days preceding the survey	30.2%
Carried a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club during the 30 days preceding the survey	17.1%
Drunk alcohol during the 30 days preceding the survey	44.9%
Used marijuana during the 30 days preceding the survey	22.4%
Attempted suicide during the 12 months preceding the survey	8.5%
Ever had sexual intercourse	46.7%
Sexually active students had not used a condom at last sexual intercourse	37.0%
Had ever injected an illegal drug	3.2%
Had smoked cigarettes during the 30 days preceding the survey	21.9%
Had not eaten five or more servings of fruits and vegetables during the day preceding the survey	78%
Had not attended physical education class daily	71.6%
Felt too unsafe to go to school	5.4%
Been in a physical fight within the last 12 months	33.0%
Had property stolen or deliberately damaged on school property within the last 12 months	29.8%

Source: Compiled from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *CDC Surveillance Summaries*, May 21, 2004. MMWR 2004: 53 (No. SS-2).

types of schools rated drug and alcohol problems as equally serious. Student use of alcohol actually increased from urban to suburban to rural schools (Shen, 1997).

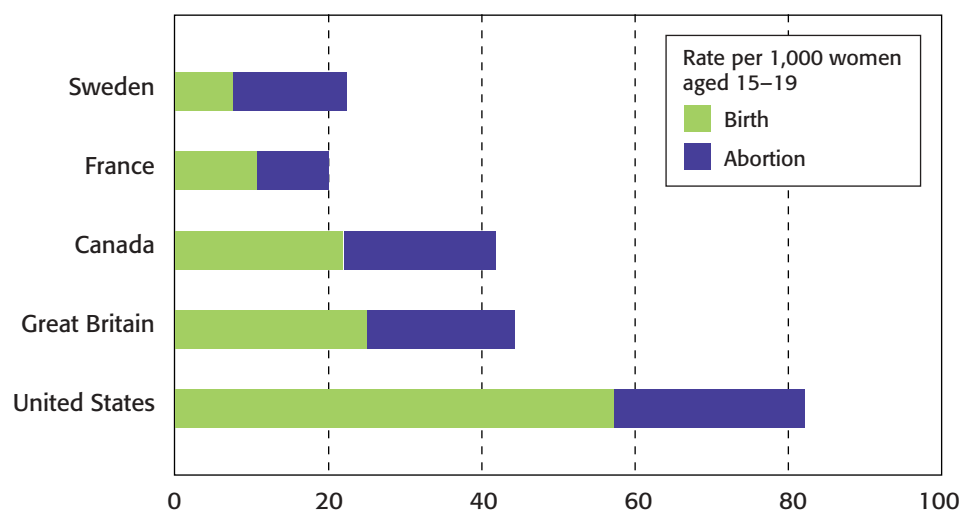
As noted in Figure 3.3, almost 50 percent of high school students indicated they were sexually active. While there is no direct correlation between sexual activity and academic achievement, some social issues related to sexual activity, such as teen pregnancy, can affect student achievement. Efforts in U.S. schools to curb teenage sexual activity and reduce pregnancy rates among teens have concentrated on abstinence-only programs as well as abstinence-based programs that include information about and access to birth control methods. While the teen pregnancy rate has gone down in recent years, the United States still has the highest rate of any industrialized nation, with nearly one million girls becoming pregnant in the United States each year despite reporting similar rates of sexual activity (Henshaw, 2003). (See Figures 3.4 and 3.5) Unfortunately far too many young women drop out of school feeling that they cannot continue their education and care for a child, particularly for those students who may have been struggling anyway. For pregnant teens doing poorly in school, pregnancy frequently becomes the final reason to drop out. School districts have responded in various ways, such as providing alternative schools for teen mothers to continue their education or special programs within their regular schools that provide additional counseling and support.

For teens who drop out of school, no matter the reason, getting a high school equivalency diploma (GED) is an option. However, students with GED diplomas are far less likely to attend or complete college than those with traditional high school diplomas. There is some evidence that by age 25, GED recipients do not fare any better in wages than high school dropouts (Mittelstadt, 1997).

● **Influencing At-Risk Students** Teachers of the twenty-first century face challenges as well as exciting possibilities. Very few things are more rewarding than positively influ-

**FIGURE 3.4**

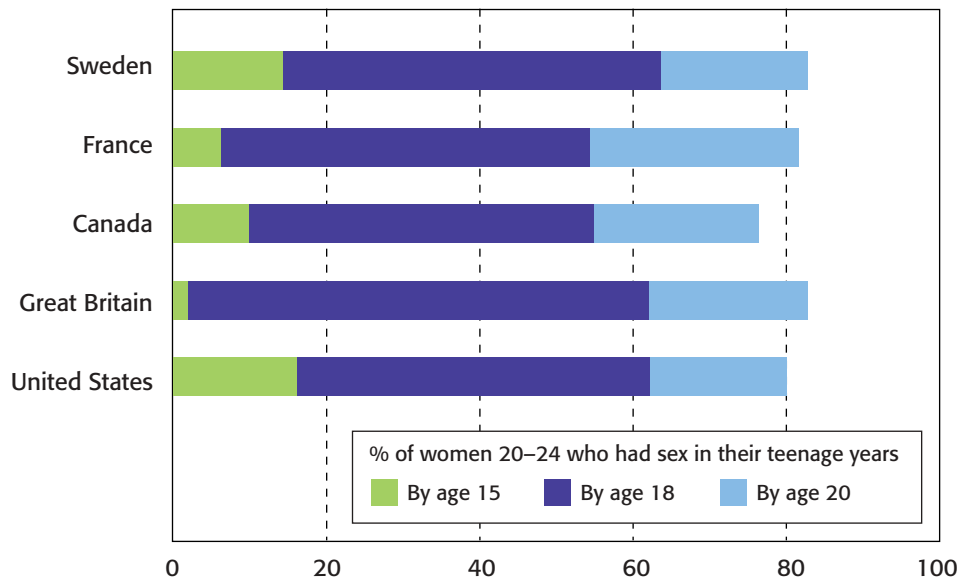
**U.S. teenagers have higher pregnancy rates, birthrates, and abortion rates than adolescents in other developed countries.**



Source: Retrieved from [www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb\\_teens.html](http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_teens.html)

FIGURE 3.5

Differences in levels of teenage sexual activity across developed countries are small

Source: Retrieved from [www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb\\_teens.html](http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_teens.html)

encing an at-risk student and watching that student succeed academically. This requires teachers who have a deep and abiding belief that every student is capable of learning if given the proper encouragement and high-quality instruction. It isn't sufficient to simply "raise the bar" when students are having difficulty meeting expectations at lower levels.

The role of the teacher is constantly evolving. Teachers cannot successfully instruct students that have problems outside the school if they define themselves strictly as subject-matter specialists. **Resiliency** has been defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity and adapt successfully. More than ever before, successful teachers must become **resiliency mentors** (Greenberg, 1999/2000). This requires teachers to understand the home lives of students and incorporate that information in their instruction as well as helping students adapt to the overall school environment.

Educators also have a larger responsibility to improve the overall school environment for all students, but particularly for students facing significant problems outside of school. Students living below the poverty line have to try to compete in school while facing more burdens than their more affluent peers. For example, in addition to facing greater medical problems, about one-third of poor children have untreated dental problems and 10 percent have lead levels in their blood high enough to cause learning problems (Lewis, 2001). Teachers who want to help students with problems need to become part of a continuum of professionals in schools and social services helping students and their families.

There is a point of view in education that teachers are subject matter specialists who understand teaching methods, but they are not social workers or counselors. Some students respond quite well to an impersonal style of teaching while other students do not. However, there are many students who would agree with a middle school student who once told her teacher, "I don't care how much you know, until I know how much you care."

## INTASC

### Principle # 1

*Knowledge of Human Development and Learning:* The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development.

## Is Education Equitable for All Students?

American public schools have been regarded historically as great engines of socioeconomic mobility. Education is the major factor that individuals can affect that correlates with future economic position in society. Ideally, a democratic society should provide a high quality public education for all of its citizens as society benefits from having more of its citizens educated to greater levels.

Educators must be knowledgeable about the legal rights of students. Special education students have a right to be educated in “the least restrictive environment.” Students who are provided adapted instruction because they are English language learners should learn the same academic content as their English-fluent peers. Access to magnet programs or other high-prestige educational opportunities cannot exclude students on the basis of race or socioeconomic class. Teachers and school staff must be current on requirements and legislation in order to help provide an equitable education for a wide range of students.

### EQUAL VS. EQUITABLE INSTRUCTION

Some important questions to ask at this juncture are, What constitutes high quality, equitable, educational opportunities? How widely available are these opportunities to students across the United States? How much inequality can the nation afford in its public schools before the general welfare is significantly affected?

**Equitable treatment** can be defined as “providing instruction and support that meet the needs of students.” This is a more complicated notion of education than equal treatment because it requires much more of educators than being able to claim sameness of treatment. It refutes the “one size fits all” notion of education. Equitable treatment is decidedly more difficult to achieve than equal treatment, but is a more worthy goal. **Equal treatment** of students can be verified once it is shown that all students are subject to the same process. Equitable treatment forces educators to focus on results and to evaluate teaching methods in light of these results. For example, one teacher may enjoy lecturing while another teacher prefers to have students work individually at their desks. Even though these two teachers are comfortable relying heavily on these methods, should they

continue this pattern if student performance in their classes is disappointing? Clearly, the proof that a method is effective lies in how much students learn.

When parents say that their sons or daughters attend “excellent schools” what do they generally mean? Is it that their particular child is being served well in that school, or that the school provides excellent instruction for all students, or perhaps both? A highly competitive suburban high school may produce more than its proportional share of National Merit Scholars, have an extensive advanced placement curriculum, and place a fair number of graduates in selective universities. Schools with these qualities are often seen as excellent schools. What if this same high school had a dropout rate well above the district’s average, had very little diversity in advanced placement courses (in spite of a fairly diverse student population), and had a disproportionate suspension rate for minority students? Would it still be considered an excellent school?

© photographer tk/PhotoEdit



*As new schools are built, policymakers and administrators stress the importance that they include the latest technology and innovations in order to provide students with the best opportunities for learning. Do “excellent facilities” guarantee learning?*

For some, the answer may still be yes, while for others it would be a definite no. The reality may be that this high school may be serving the needs of the top 25 to 30 percent of its students very well, but the school's culture may not be accommodating to students in the bottom third of their classes. This hypothetical high school is performing part of its mission superbly while failing to provide a high quality, equitable educational opportunity for all students.

In the current age of educational accountability, high stakes testing is often seen as another major indicator of a school's excellence. Test scores must be examined not only as aggregate totals for a school, but test data must be disaggregated to look at how different populations in a school are faring academically. A school may have acceptable average standardized test scores while segments of that school's population are faring poorly, but are not noticeable in the overall average. No Child Left Behind requires the latter.

## EFFECT OF TEACHERS ON STUDENT LEARNING

The single most important factor that society controls in providing an equitable education is the quality of the teacher. After examining a number of studies on the impact of school resources on academic achievement, Darling-Hammond and Youngs (2002, p. 17) conclude that "teacher qualifications appear to have the greatest impact on what students learn and that qualified teachers are unequally allocated to students by race, income and location." Teacher qualifications include subject-matter mastery, versatile teaching and evaluation skills, advanced degrees, and teaching experience. This finding is encouraging for students who are planning to become teachers: you are the single most significant element in your students' academic life. Acquiring strong subject matter mastery and sound pedagogical skills will yield significant results for your future students. The discouraging side of this finding is that teachers with the strongest qualifications are more often found serving academically proficient rather than academically needy students.

All states have some portion of their teachers working on temporary or emergency credentials. (See Figure 3.6 on page 134.) These teachers are much more likely to be found in schools serving higher proportions of poor or minority students than in schools serving larger numbers of middle or upper-middle class majority students (David & Shields, 2001). An important question to raise is, "If schools are committed to equitable instruction for all students, shouldn't teachers with temporary credentials be equally distributed among all schools?" If not, what are the factors that influence the concentration of these teachers in classrooms and schools that serve mostly academically needy students? The teaching vacancies which are most difficult to fill are not just positions in mathematics and science. Teaching positions in poor rural or inner-city schools generally have more turnover than those in middle-class suburban ones. Good teachers are important for all students, but they are critical for students who face poverty, racism, or significant social problems. Teachers are often one of the major guiding lights for students facing social ills. When these students persevere and succeed academically, it is often because of the dedication, confidence, and support of superior teachers.

Nieto (2002) raises some profound questions about equity in schooling. She is concerned that while the proportion of students of color increased from 22 percent in 1972 to 37 percent in 1998, the teaching force is 87 percent White and is likely to become less diverse in the near future. Nieto also cites two studies (Clewell, Puma, & McKay, 2001; Dee, 2000) that suggest higher numbers of teachers of color in a school, particularly African American and Hispanic, can promote the achievement of African American and Hispanic students.

As a prospective teacher, what does the trend that Nieto cites suggest for your own teacher preparation? An encouraging note on this issue is that the quality of teachers is much more important than their race or ethnicity in promoting student learning.

## INTASC

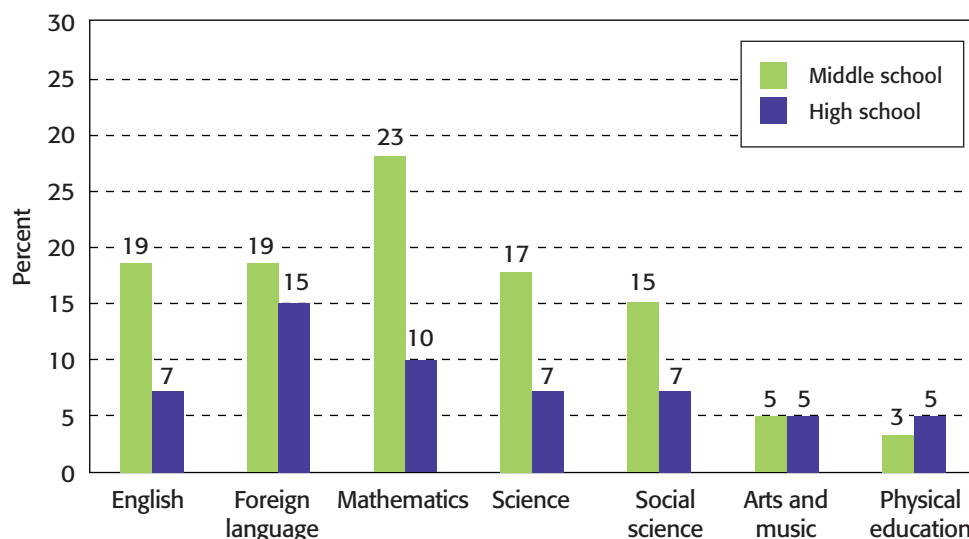
### Principle # 2

#### **Knowledge of Human Development and Learning:**

The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.

FIGURE 3.6

**OUT-OF-FIELD TEACHERS:** Percentage of public school students in middle and high school grades taught by teachers without a major or certification in the field they teach, by subject area: 1999–2000



Note: Major refers only to a teacher's primary field of study for a bachelor's degree.

Source: Seastrom, M.M., Gruber, K.J., Henke, R.R., McGrath, D.J., and Cohen, B.A. (2002). *Qualifications of the Public School Teacher Workforce: Prevalence of Out-of-Field Teaching 1987–99 to 1999–2000* (NCES 2002–603), tables B-8 and B-9. Data from U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public Teacher Questionnaire," 1999–2000 and "Charter Teacher Questionnaire," 1999–2000. Obtained online at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2003/charts/chart28.asp>.

## PREPARING STUDENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Another equity issue in education is the preparation of U.S. public school students for admission into highly competitive universities. Traditionally, the most elite and competitive universities, whether public or private, have relied heavily on students' high school grade point averages and standardized test scores. Altwell (2000) notes that "the average freshman entering UCLA has a grade point average of 4.16. The University of California at Berkeley turns away hundreds of applicants with a straight A average." This phenomenon occurs when students take advanced placement or honors courses where an A counts as 4.5 quality points instead of 4.0 points, as in a regular course. Many students attending poor inner-city or rural schools where few or no advanced placement or honors courses are offered cannot produce averages over 4.0, even if they earned nothing lower than an A in four years of high school.

Some public high schools try to cultivate a tradition of excellence by claiming perfect or near-perfect pass rates on advanced placement exams by their graduates. They trust that these pass rates will impress elite universities who are considering their graduates for admission. However, in the zeal to maintain the highest pass rates possible, some very able students may be counseled away from advanced placement courses for fear that these students may bring down the pass rate on advanced placement exams. When this occurs, the interests of a few in the school take priority over extending maximum educational oppor-





## EDUCATION MATTERS

### Minority Teachers for Minority Students

**A**ccording to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (1999), ethnic teachers represent about 9 percent of U.S. public school teachers, but that number is expected to drop to less than 5 percent in the coming years. Meanwhile, ethnic students constitute 40 percent of the total student body in the United States, and this proportion is expected to increase significantly. This disparity has always been an issue, but the situation is getting worse because fewer culturally diverse students are entering teaching. Most are now pursuing degrees in business and other fields with greater salaries.

In a school district in Arizona, leaders spoke with ethnic staff members and created several strategies for attracting and retaining a diverse staff. Their plan includes hot topics such as considering paying these teachers more money to attract them and starting support groups that discuss racism with other faculty and students while they are working in the districts. They want districts to take time to talk with them and learn about them. You can read all about this issue in *Educational Leadership*, May 2001, "Supporting a Diverse Teacher Corps".

**The Education Issue:** The need for more ethnically diverse teachers for diverse students

### How The Lack of a Diverse Teacher Corps Impacts Teachers and Students:

Students in schools who never see a teacher who looks like them or is at least different from the mainstream students have no role models as teachers. Students from other countries entering school have a need to belong and feel part of the new school culture. Having teachers in the school building who are bilingual and understand another culture creates a level of tolerance for differences. Students can identify with teachers who understand that differences are strengths to be shared. One concern for schools is that the number of cultural groups far exceeds the ethnic groups for teachers. Even teachers of ethnic groups would be teaching students of other origins. These teachers would also have to reach out to learn another new culture.

### What's Your Opinion?

Do you agree bonuses are a way to attract and retain diverse teachers? How might other teachers in the district feel about that? What would be an important incentive for you? How many diverse teacher candidates are in your teacher education class? How will you provide students with role models for all of the various cultures in your classroom?

tunities for all students. Over time, schools develop climates and cultures that become their trademarks. These climates may or may not be equally receptive to all students in a school.

Students in public schools throughout the United States are encouraged by their parents and teachers to do their best in school. This is sound advice since academic performance is a very important variable in college success as well as in affecting gains at work later in life. Students are often unaware that the public schools they attend may or may not give them an education that places them in a competitive posture to attend elite colleges and universities, or to succeed if admitted. Quite naturally, students assume that if they are doing well at their current level, they are prepared to be successful at the next.

The number of high school graduates increased steadily each year during the 1990s and is expected to continue to increase through the first decade of the twenty-first century. This increasing demand for college and university education is occurring at the same time

when most states have cut the budgets of higher education; in some cases by 25 percent or more (Attewell, 2000). The resulting imbalance between demand and supply has created high levels of competition for university admission—especially at the most prestigious state universities—as well as increases in the cost of higher education that must be borne by the student or the student's family. In 2003, the board that governs the State University of New York System proposed a 41 percent increase in tuition which would raise tuition an average of \$1,400 for in-state undergraduates (*Sun-Sentinel*, 2003). Similar measures have been enacted by legislatures and governing boards in other states.

### PREPARING STUDENTS FOR WORK AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Nearly all high schools have programs aimed at students who plan to enter the world of work immediately after high school. They have different labels such as “on the job training” (OJT), “diversified cooperative training” (DCT), or “partnerships with business.” Whatever the label, these programs attempt to give the student some practical work experience while still in high school. Some programs allow the student to leave school early to work while others may give credit for after-school work. While there is no single national model, these programs tend to have formal connections between the teacher in charge of the program and the employer. Students are frequently rated on their performance at work as well as at school. Many students who have performed well at work while still in high school are offered permanent positions by employers as a result of these programs.

### ARE STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND EQUITY COMPLEMENTARY OR COMPETING INTERESTS?

The issue of equity in education is one that has precipitated much controversy over the years. What is meant by equity? Is it providing each student the ideal educational environment? Do we mean educating each student to the fullest of his/her potential? If so, who determines what that potential is? What resources should be devoted to the education of your child? Is the answer the same when considering the education of other people's children?

These questions have generated much debate over time, but one thing is certain: no debate about equity in education can ignore how society distributes resources for education or how students of different social class backgrounds have access to resources.

Many states have enacted state-wide high-stakes testing where students from all of the state's public schools are measured by the same yardstick. The tests tend to be fairly similar, testing almost entirely verbal and quantitative skills instead of the entire curriculum that students take in school. However, the following characteristics tend to vary widely among public schools: per-pupil expenditures, access to quality and subject-certified teachers, access to honors curricula, and access to high-quality physical facilities. Advocates of state-wide **high-stakes testing** argue that similar expectations on standardized tests will “raise the bar” in low performing schools. Presumably, teachers and students will “try harder” to meet the common standards for all schools. Failure to meet these standards frequently has very negative effects for both students and schools. While the penalties vary from state to state, students may not pass to the next grade or they may get a certificate of completion instead of a high school diploma if they don't achieve minimum scores on the state's high-stakes test. For schools, penalties may range from being placed on probation, losing funds, or possibly losing their students to other schools and being closed.

Opponents of high-stakes testing argue that meeting common state-wide standards is fine as long as schools have similar levels of resources, quality of teachers and emphasis is placed on the entire school curriculum, not just verbal and quantitative skills. Opponents argue that these circumstances are not found very frequently in U.S. public schools and school reform should involve the whole school environment and not just testing. Ask-



## BUILDING ON EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

### How are Educational Resources Distributed?

Any society such as the United States has a finite number of resources. This is certainly true in the case of how much money is spent on education. Whenever a school budget is put together, the question arises: What should we spend our resources on? This is an especially difficult question when we consider special and gifted education.

Assume that a school district spends, on average, \$7,000 per year on educating each of its students. Do certain groups deserve more funding than others? For example, should a student with a special talent as a violinist be provided lessons to help him or her develop their talent? Is this more important than giving a student with learning disabilities extra tutoring so that they can do a minimally passable level of academic work?

Some would argue that the school and society's obligation is to provide each and every student with the opportunity to become all that he or she is capable of being. But what if resources are scarce? Is it more important to build a new city hall, or to use the

same money to pay for an enrichment program for performing art students in a large school district?

Should schools help children who come from poorer families get reduced or free lunches? Is this actually part of an educational system's responsibility? Should schools provide students with medical assistance such as an annual physical checkup? What about providing contraceptives for sexually active teenagers?

Do you think that a wealthy school district with a large tax base needs to share its resources with poorer districts? This is happening in Kentucky, where school systems in more affluent parts of the state, such as Louisville, are sharing revenues from the local taxes they collect with poorer districts in rural Appalachia.

What do you think? What should be the guidelines for making decisions concerning the use of educational resources in American society in order to meet the needs of all students?

ing students to meet higher standards without looking at systemic change in schools is like asking a high jumper to jump higher by raising the bar instead of changing the training.

Besides meeting state standards, student test data on the state's high-stakes test is used to determine **adequate yearly progress (AYP)** mandated by No Child Left Behind. The proficiency levels for reading and mathematics a school must meet increase over the years until they reach 100 percent in the 2013–14 academic year. Time will tell whether this goal is met or whether it will be an optimistic desire of policy makers.

Another key issue in providing equity in education is the role played by factors that schools do not control. One study of North Carolina elementary schools examined reading and mathematics achievement among fourth graders over three years. This study found that student demographic factors (percent of students on free/reduced lunch, parents' average level of education) were the best predictors of mathematics and reading achievement (Okpala, 2002, 885–907). When schools are asked to meet certain minimum standards in skill achievement, some schools cannot fail to achieve these by virtue of the economic advantages many of their pupils enjoy. Other schools, with mostly economically disadvantaged student populations, must show enormous improvements in order to reach the same minimum standard. Assuming schools with many economically disadvantaged students make greater gains but still miss the minimum standards, they are often subject to sanctions not given schools in wealthier communities who made lesser gains, but still achieved above the target standardized test scores.



## Through the Eyes of Culturally Sensitive Teachers

### Fair Grading Standards for All Students

**M**iguel Suarez is a fourth-grade teacher in a large U.S. school district. He noticed that the box marked M (for modified curriculum), which was used for English language learners and for special education students, had been removed from the report card. He was very concerned and shared the concerns in the following letter with one of his professors:

*Dear Professor,*

*I am sending you this letter because I feel there is something wrong with the district's new report card. Last year, English language learners and special education students received grades with M (for modified curriculum) marked in the standards box. This year the M has been removed. Additionally, teachers of English language learners are being told by administrators that, with rare exceptions, English language learners are to receive grades no higher than a C. Grades of A or B indicate that these students are not being challenged and need more difficult work. Any other students who have English as a native language have the possibility of achieving A or B grades.*

*I questioned my assistant principal about the change in report card format as well as the directions ESOL teachers were receiving not to award grades of A or B. She was not happy with my questions. She began to lose her temper and told me to "forget about it"*

*She said the decision had been made and there would be no changes. I asked who made the decision and why, but she responded, "It doesn't matter." When*

*I suggested asking someone in the district office about the report card change she said, "You can't do that" (meaning contacting people in higher positions).*

*After recovering from this shock, I concluded that there was something "fishy" about this whole thing. I feel very annoyed because the structure of this new report card will paint a very negative picture of our English language learners and shows a blatant disregard for our ESOL student population. Maybe this is nothing new; but it shouldn't go unchallenged.*

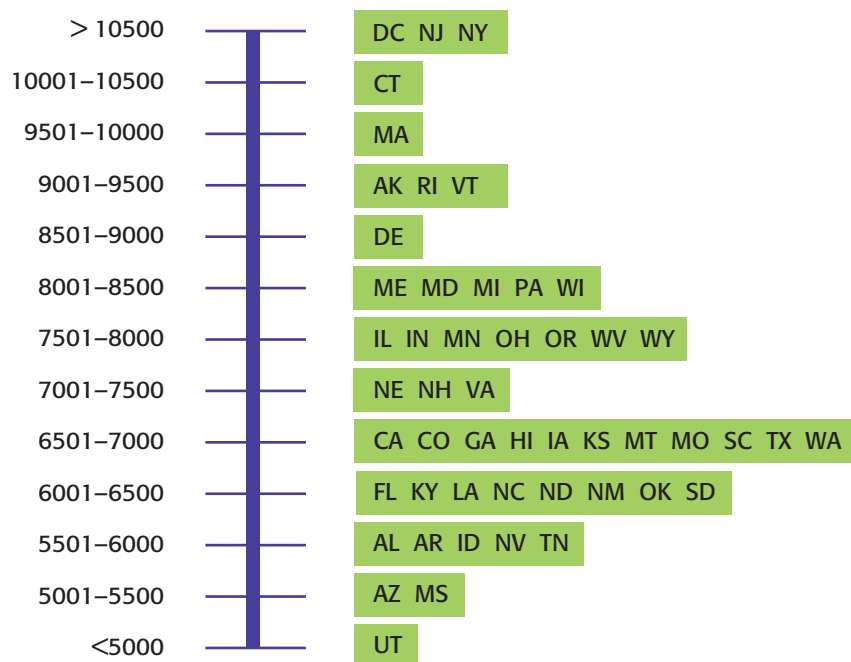
*I think I have done enough venting for now. I would appreciate some of your valuable time to let me know if you think this new report card is fair to our ESOL students. I would also like to know what steps you suggest, since you have more knowledge and experience than I do.*

*Thank you so much,  
Miguel Suarez*

#### Points to Ponder

1. Why do you think the assistant principal is resistant to answering Miguel's questions?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the district policy to remove the "M for modified curriculum" from the report card for ESOL and special education students? Give at least one reason for your response.
3. What, if anything, would you advise Miguel to do at this juncture?
4. What are some of the potential risks/rewards of pursuing this matter or "forgetting about it" for Miguel? For the English language learners in his school district?

With a public school structure in the United States that encompasses 50 state departments of education and thousands of local school boards, the American system of education is not designed to produce a common product. It is a structure that is highly sensitive to local needs, but it is very difficult to make wholesale changes in U.S. public schools that will affect each and every student. This same decentralized school governance structure is

**FIGURE 3.7****Current per-pupil expenditures for elementary and secondary schools: School Year 2000–2001**

*Note:* Current expenditures include salaries, employee benefits, purchased services, and supplies, but exclude capital outlay, debt service, facilities acquisition and construction, and equipment. Dollar amount for states and the District of Columbia were grouped in \$500 ranges (e.g., \$8501–\$9000).

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core Data, “National Public Education Financial Survey” School Year 2000–2001.

mirrored in a public school financing structure that creates significant gaps in per-pupil funding not only among states, but within a state as well (Figure 3.7).

The issue of exactly how much money impacts the quality of education, when compared to other factors such as teacher effort and student initiative, is a topic that has been widely debated. Students have no choice but to face the financial circumstances present in their schools. However, when it comes to money and the quality of public education, it is difficult to argue with one educator’s observation that, “I would rather be with it than without it.” Most educators would concur with the notion that when there are significant funding gaps among public schools, this creates a great obstacle to providing equity in public education.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY AND INCLUSION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS**

Education for students with disabilities has undergone significant changes in the past four decades. In 1975, the U.S. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (also known as Public Law 94-142). This act was reauthorized in 1990 as the Individuals





"I made a Valentine's Day card for you.  
The school has no art supplies so I  
wrote the color in."

with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Key features of this legislation were that persons between the ages of 3 and 21 be provided with a **free and appropriate education** and that education should take place in the **least restrictive environment**. Additional language mandating individualized instruction for qualifying students resulted in requiring an **individualized education plan (IEP)** for each student. These stipulations in the law were included so that students with disabilities would receive the necessary attention that had often eluded them in the past. No longer could these students be relegated to the back of a classroom, labeled as slow learners, and simply ignored when they did not achieve at the levels expected for other students.

Today, all states have certification standards for teachers of students in various categories of special education (Figure 3.8). Some states permit teachers to teach students with a wide range of disabilities with a "varying exceptionalities" certification, while other states require a certification for each specific exceptionality. The varying exceptionalities certification has the advantage of allowing the teacher to be certified with a wide range of special education students and to be more versatile. The single certification for each exceptionality generally provides teachers with greater background about one category of special education students.

Two of the most important equity issues in special education today are the appropriate identification of students in various special education programs and the overall proportion of students from different ethnic groups placed in special education classes.

● **Appropriate Identification.** The first step in getting a student into the process that may result in special education placement is referral by a regular classroom teacher. It is critical that classroom teachers be aware of what appropriate signs of learning disabilities (other special education categories) are in order to make referrals based on accurate evidence and not on misinterpretations of cultural differences. Likewise, teacher attitudes toward students with disabilities can play a role in referrals. One study of preservice teach-

**FIGURE 3.8**

### Special Education Teaching Assignments

Learning disabilities	Orthopedically impaired
Mental retardation	Mildly handicapped
Emotional disturbance	Autism
Speech and hearing impairment	Developmentally delayed
Special education, general	Early childhood special education
Deaf and hard-of-hearing	Other special education
Visually handicapped	

Source: Adapted from Tables 2, 3, and 4 in Whitten, E., & Rodriguez-Campos, L. (Spring 2003). Trends in the special education teaching force: Do they reflect legislative mandates and legal requirements? *Educational HORIZONS*, pp. 141–142.





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Once isolated in special education rooms, all children with disabilities experienced limited social interactions. Today, as a result of inclusion efforts, teachers in traditional classrooms and special education centers work together to provide an environment that is both academically and socially inclusive.

ers produced the following result: over one third of respondents felt that children in a traditional classroom would be uncomfortable with disabled children and said that disabled children feel sorry for themselves (Maushak, Kelley, & Blodgett, 2001). These attitudes would hamper the judgments of this group of future teachers when they have to make decisions referring students for special education placement.

Another topic involving the proportion of special education students is their growing share of the overall public school student population in most states. Some states have become concerned about the growing numbers of special education students because they increase the budget for public education. Most of this growth has been in categories that do not involve physical disabilities. Blindness, deafness, and severe physical disabilities are relatively rare, occurring in less than one percent of the total school population. On the other hand, learning disabilities have been found in about five percent of children in U.S. public schools (Hehir, 2002). The typical special education student costs 1.9 times as much to educate than a general education student. The assessment process alone may cost around \$1800 per student (Buntin, 2002). Some states have discussed capping the overall number of special education students.

In the past decade, there has been much more emphasis on educating special education students in the least restrictive environment. This has prompted the **inclusion** of many special education students in general education classes. Currently, about 73 percent of students with mild disabilities are taught in general education classrooms (Maheady, Harper, & Mallette, 2001). Ideally, general classroom teachers co-teach or work with the assistance of special education teachers to meet the needs of special education students in their classrooms. Special education students in public schools generate greater revenues than general education students in order to allow for smaller class sizes, aides and other supports necessary to meet their needs. When these students are placed in special education classes, these resources are generally concentrated there. However, under the inclusion model, resources are supposed to follow the special education students that generate them, but they do not always do so. When general education teachers are assigned special education students, but feel that additional resources allocated for these students have been diverted to other parts of the school, frustration may result. Students with mild disabilities who encounter problems in the general education classroom often have difficulty in the following domains:

- Basic academic skills (e.g., reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics);
- Academic-related behaviors (e.g., school survival skills, study and organizational skills);
- Behavioral and interpersonal interactions (e.g., motivation, prosocial behavior) (Maheady, Harper, & Mallette, 2001).

In order to make the inclusion model successful, general education teachers may need additional training to assist special education students and resources (special education teachers, aides, assistive technology) have to be available in the general education classroom.

In some schools, a division develops between general and special education teachers where the full responsibility for educating special education students is placed solely on special education teachers. Some schools have developed innovative programs which minimize the labeling of students and have general and special education teachers sharing the responsibility for the success of special education students. Some states, like New York, have required public schools to include special education students in statewide testing as well as to report separately these students' results. The national No Child Left Behind legislation has similar requirements as New York for special education students to be tested even though alternative assessments may be used. As this law is implemented nationally, other states may look to New York to track the progress of special education students (Buntin, 2002, p. 46).

Some special educators (Salend, Duhaney, & Montgomery, 2002) have suggested that alternative assessments be employed along with more traditional standardized testing. Among these techniques, they suggest the use of performance-based and portfolio assessment, curriculum-based measurement, rubrics, and students' journals. These assessments can provide a fuller picture of special education students' abilities, weaknesses and learning styles.

The combination of increased monitoring of progress, better diagnostic techniques and cooperation between general and special education teachers should improve the success rate for students with learning disabilities. Traditionally, these students have dropped out of high school at twice the rate of non-learning disabled students (Hehir, 2002).

One of the equity issues regarding special education that remains to be answered is, Will the emphasis on high-stakes state-mandated testing help or hurt special education students? If the additional monitoring results in greater attention being given to the scores of special education students (because they count for the school's score), and this provides students with better teachers and instruction, it will be a beneficial reform. If it results in special education students having to clear a higher bar with few/no changes, or if special education students and their teachers are resented by other segments of the school for "bringing down the average," it will prove harmful. Time and additional research will show which answer is closest to being correct.

### PLACEMENT BASED ON RACE AND ETHNICITY

Disproportional placement of students from racial and ethnic minorities in special education plagues many special education programs across the United States. In general, racial and ethnic minority students are overrepresented in special education categories that involve a learning or behavioral disability, while being underrepresented in the gifted category. One warning sign to educators in this area is that if the number of students in special education are far greater or fewer than their numbers in the general school district population, care should be taken to review for bias in the referral and testing mechanisms in place.

An example of this was reported in a study that looked at a sample of 200 White and 200 African American students in grades one through four. From these 400 students, 28

White students and 54 African American students were referred for special education (Eisenman, 2001). It is very likely that the educators who made these referrals did not perceive any bias in the process, but the overall ratio of students referred suggests that there may be problems with the special education placement process.

When race and ethnicity are examined as predictors of special education placement in various states, they show that states with higher populations of White students served more special education students in general classroom settings. In states with higher proportions of minority students, more special education students were taught in special education classes. More students in states with high minority populations left high school with a certificate of completion rather than the more desirable high school diploma. The reason why disproportionality occurs fairly widely in special education placements is not fully understood, but investigators suggest that it is related to (1) poverty, (2) cultural bias in referral and assessment, (3) unique factors related to ethnicity, and (4) school-based factors (Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 1999). Agbenyega (1999) suggested that when budget crises reduce preschool and kindergarten services for millions of at-risk students in urban areas, this generates additional referrals to special education classes. He also adds that often minority parents do not have advocacy groups to educate them about alternatives to special education, re-assessment, and “de-placement.”

## STUDENTS IN GIFTED EDUCATION

African American and Hispanic students are also subject to disproportionate placement in another area of special education: **gifted** programs. Some districts have hired specialists to address the underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students in gifted education. Because of the “elite” status of gifted programs in most school districts, these limited slots are highly desired by many parents. There are equity issues that arise in the assessment and placement of students in these programs. For instance, most students who show high potential must wait to be recognized and then referred for testing by a general classroom teacher. Once referred, there may be a long wait for the school psychologist to actually test the student.

While entry criteria may vary among districts, an IQ score of 130 or 135 is commonly required. Some students are tested privately by their parents (often more than once) and repeated testing generally improves a student’s score because of greater familiarity with the test. The best score is then submitted to the school district for admission into the gifted program.

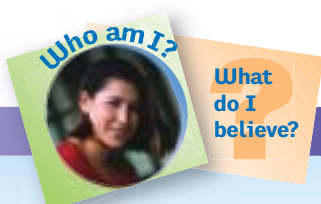
A key question here is, What constitutes giftedness? Is it strictly a high score on an IQ test (a more restrictive definition) or does giftedness also include outstanding ability in one field (a more inclusive definition)? Generally, school districts that incorporate both definitions of giftedness will have a more diverse student population in gifted programs than districts that use only the first definition (Soller, 2003).

One justification for teaching gifted students in separate classrooms away from the general population is that because of their outstanding abilities, gifted students would quickly get bored in the general education classroom because they will finish their work too quickly. A gifted classroom, where the work is paced more to gifted students’ abilities, should eliminate any potential issues over slower students holding back the gifted. In general gifted students are self-motivated learners although some may lack the skills to accomplish their goals. Classrooms that emphasize autonomy and cooperation better accommodate most gifted students (Porath, 1996).

However, another approach to this issue is the inclusion of gifted students in general classrooms with support from gifted specialists. This way, activities are ready when gifted students complete their “regular work.” When gifted students in general classrooms are not provided with sufficient challenge, the results are quite predictable. One study of gifted students in general classrooms found that most did not find their social studies and language arts classes challenging. About 75 percent found a challenge in mathematics and

classes designed for gifted students and most found science classes challenging only if they were involved with hands on activities (Gallagher, Harradine, & Coleman, 1997).

Another issue of importance is that parents whose children are in the gifted program may become less concerned about students in the general school population. Some critics of gifted education also question that if lower class sizes, expertly trained teachers, additional field trips, and other supports work to improve the performance of gifted students, wouldn't these factors also improve the performance of students in the general school population? This is an issue of resource allocation which policymakers must decide. High-status knowledge can be made available to a wide array of students, not just those who are extremely talented, if educators believe they may all profit from it and are willing to explain these concepts in accessible ways to the general student population.



"What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that is what the community must want for all of its children."

JOHN DEWEY, EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHER

### THINK ABOUT THIS:

How does Dewey's quote relate to the discussion on equitable education?

### SHARE and COMPARE:

Contact your state department of education for a breakdown of per-pupil expenditures for each district in your state. Notice the difference in per-pupil expenditures between the lowest and highest spending districts. Discuss the gap in per-pupil expenditures with a classmate. Do either of you think that money spent on pupils gives them an advantage or a disadvantage in a competitive educational system? Why or why not?

## WHAT EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS ARE BEST FOR RACIAL OR LINGUISTIC MINORITY STUDENTS?

### GROUPING PRACTICES

Parents, educators, and policymakers may agree that a quality education is important for all students in the United States, but often there is disagreement over how to bring this about. Historically, most students of different social classes, races, and ethnicities were educated separately from one another. There was an implicit assumption that in order to achieve excellence, equity had to be sacrificed. Some people's reasoning behind separating students was pure bias, while others felt that without this separation very capable students wouldn't reach their potential. There are some valid reasons for grouping students for instruction. However, when students are placed in remedial or slow groups, one common problem is that these students are stigmatized or even ridiculed by their peers. When an elementary teacher disguises the levels of reading groups by calling them *bluebirds*, *cardinals*, or *robins*, students immediately know if the robins have the lowest reading proficiency. These early labels can leave a stigma that lasts for life.

Some schools use **tracking** to place students on different paths for all subjects. In many high



schools, students are advised and scheduled into classes for the college or university bound, the business or work experience track, or perhaps a vocational/technical curriculum. Advocates of tracking argue that this makes instruction easier for teachers and more effective for students because classes have a narrower range of backgrounds and abilities among students. Opponents of tracking point out that if a student's "direction" is determined at an early age than a child's options may be limited later in their school years. For example, if "high status knowledge" necessary for college or university success is given only to students in one track, then those in other tracks who later wish to pursue a college education will have a very difficult time. Additional concerns regarding tracking are that often students with great academic potential are immature at the age when tracking begins and mistakes are frequently made with students who have yet to show their full potential.

While tracking is very prevalent in U.S. schools today, studies have shown that the only difference between high and low tracks is that students in lower tracks are consistently taught less complex subject matter than what they would need later if they decide to enter higher education (Oakes, 1995). Tracking serves to lower aspirations of students in the lower tracks. About 64 percent of African American students expect to finish college, but only 25 percent enroll in high school college preparatory courses (Mallery & Mallery, 1999, p. 14). Jeannie Oakes, one of the leading scholars of tracking notes that, "schools far more often judge African American and Latino students to have learning deficits and limited potential" (1995, p. 682)

About 80 percent of U.S. public high schools engage in some form of tracking on a school-wide basis (Mallery & Mallery, 1999). Perceptions by educators of students' abilities are impacted by the track they may have been assigned early in elementary school. Frazier (1997, p. 13) observes that, "Ability grouping eventually leads to tracking. We aren't going to be able to separate the two. Society still carries the baggage of classism and racism and that baggage will flow into the school system." Assuming there is some of this baggage in our public schools, what can current and future educators do to minimize this baggage for students?

If schools are going to group students according to abilities, every conceivable precaution should be taken to ensure that low ability groups have as much opportunity to learn high status knowledge as their peers. Students in English as a Second Language and special education classes must be regarded as integral parts of a school's community. If teachers in the general program are organizing special activities, care should be taken to include all students. There is often an assumption made that students attending the same school are enjoying the same school climate. This cannot be taken for granted because students of differing backgrounds experience different aspects of school culture. They are often sharing the common areas (cafeteria, hallways) of a school, not the classrooms, with students from different tracks.

## EDUCATING IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

When immigrant students enter school in the United States, they have significant adaptations to make. Many factors affect these adaptations. Some of these are age at the time of immigration, time spent in the host country, the socioeconomic background of the student, and family aspirations. One of the key elements in effective immigrant education is the ability of educators to clarify their own philosophical approaches (Schoorman, 2001). Clearly, immigrant students need to be functional in American society. To achieve this goal, teachers need to be sensitive to the cultural and language differences that immigrant students bring with them. Encouragement to speak only English may be intended to help the immigrant student adapt more quickly to the United States, but can be misconstrued by the student to imply that his or her language has no place, or is inferior. Such a message can be devastating to immigrant students, especially when made by a teacher.

Because of the growing nature of diversity in today's classrooms, teachers must be careful to avoid sending a message of *American exceptionalism*. While certainly not the norm, this philosophy may be encountered on occasion. This belief goes beyond the general notion that U.S. schools should instill a love of country and patriotism in students.

Guterk defines American exceptionalism as a notion that, “the American nation, its people and their culture are different from people of other countries: they are ‘extraordinary’ or ‘superior’ (2004, p. 164). There is a fine, but important, line between being proud of who you are and being convinced that you are superior to others. The latter view, no matter how well intended, is not likely to be admired by students in U.S. schools who do not come from mainstream U.S. culture and are trying to learn it. Teachers who are border crossers help parents and students who do not come from mainstream U.S. culture understand the virtues and challenges of this nation, while still valuing their own backgrounds.

In communities that receive a significant number of immigrant students, school districts have begun newcomer programs to help newly-arrived students with the adaptation process. These programs may vary in approach. Some have devoted an entire school solely to newcomers while others use the school within a school model. Some offer **English as a Second Language**, others have bilingual education and some offer both. The length of these programs is generally from one to three semesters and they typically focus on middle and high school students because adaptation to the U.S. curriculum at these levels is more demanding than in elementary school (Short and Boyson, 2001).

Students in English as a second language classes in science or history earn the same credits as other students taking these subjects in the general program, but they may not always be taught an equivalent amount of material. At the end of high school, these students are tested to assess their skill levels in mathematics and English typically by a standardized test. In some cases, students who have been studying English for two years are asked to meet proficiency standards that researchers say take five or more years to attain. When states impose expectations that cannot be met within a given period of time, advocates for immigrant students are likely to challenge these practices in the courts.

Most immigrant students are pleased to be attending schools in the United States and tend to see a public education as an opportunity for a better life than what they may have enjoyed in their countries of origin. It is not unusual for an immigrant student just starting to learn English to go through a silent period. Some may think the student is withdrawing or perhaps is very shy. What is happening is that the student is focusing on listening to English and building vocabulary. Once time passes and a significant number of English words are familiar, the student will begin to speak more English.

American schools have been teaching immigrant students for over two centuries. The philosophy today is often quite different than in the past. Immigrant students today are not usually asked to reject their original culture and language in order to learn English and receive an education in American schools.

### PATTERNS OF STUDENT SEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION

Population migration of the past two decades has resulted in a growing trend toward resegregation of the public school system. Desegregation efforts of the 1970s often involved court orders to enforce changes in attendance boundaries that school boards were reluctant to impose because they were politically unpopular. With the passing of time, racial and ethnic characteristics of neighborhoods changed, particularly in cities. As White flight to the suburbs increased, the old court orders did not fit the new reality of residential patterns. Courts were sometimes reluctant to extend desegregation orders that were fifteen or twenty years old. The net result has been U.S. public schools becoming more segregated than they were in the 1980s.

This movement toward resegregation has led some people to now argue in favor of **neighborhood schools**, the preferable apolitical term that helps seeming to favor segregated schools. Nonetheless, when neighborhoods are racially and ethnically segregated, and most are, then a neighborhood school

*Meeting the needs of English Language Learners in our schools is one of the greatest challenges facing educators today and onward into the future. What steps are you taking in your preparation to make sure you are able to meet the needs of ESL students?*





becomes a segregated school. Thus, successful arguments for neighborhood schools resulted in significant racial/ethnic segregation without appearing to favor segregation.

Unfortunately as urban schools lose more middle and upper class parents (with their significant political influence) to suburban or private schools, the schools become more resource poor, which affects educational opportunities. Berliner and Biddle (1996, p. 55) have suggested a student achievement law that reads, “Regardless of what anyone claims about student and school characteristics, **opportunity to learn** is the single most powerful predictor of student achievement.” If these authors are correct, how consistent is the opportunity to learn in the United States? How does the average educational opportunity given to racial, ethnic, and linguistic minority students compare with that given to their mainstream peers?

## OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

No element of an opportunity to learn is more important than a quality well-prepared teacher. Mora (2000, p. 722) observes the following about teachers of **limited English proficient** (LEP) students: “In the early 1990’s, only 30 percent of teachers with LEP students had received any form of LEP instruction training.” Clearly, even the best intentioned teachers cannot be expected to adequately teach a student population they have not been prepared to teach.

- **Bilingual Needs** There is a difference in public support if people are asked if they support bilingual education, or dual language programs. Bilingual education is seen as teaching in English and in the native language only to students who speak a first language other than English. Dual language programs teach in English and a foreign language as well, but in these programs the student population is composed of native English speakers as well as English as a second language learners. Generally, public support is stronger for dual language programs than for bilingual programs. Since both programs teach in English and another language, what would account for the difference? Could it be that dual language programs involve native English speakers and thus are not perceived to be remedial in any way?

Dual language programs may also be called **two-way immersion** (TWI) programs. Although relatively rare in U.S. schools, they represent a promising alternative for educating English as a second language learners and simultaneously providing second language competency to native English speakers. Some programs assign “buddies” to students who will mentor them in language acquisition. The buddies are students who are more proficient in the target language (Li & Nes, 2001). This can be done for English as well as the other language in a TWI program. Although research on these relatively new programs is limited, most studies confirm that students in TWI programs perform as well or better on English standardized achievement tests than students in monolingual English or transitional bilingual programs. In addition, there is some evidence that TWI programs promote positive cross-cultural relationships among students (Christian, Howard, & Loeb, 2000).

- **Classroom Climate** Teachers and school administrators cannot make assumptions about classroom or school climate. Each should be objectively assessed and, if found lacking, steps should be taken to improve it. Often, students who feel uncomfortable in a school respond with oppositional behavior and resist what teachers or administrators are asking them to do. If students feel that we do not value them, they will often resist performing well. From this perspective, doing well in the class of a teacher who doesn’t value you is like rewarding the last person you want to reward. While this may not make sense to most adults, some adolescents feel it is justified.

In some schools, students of color have defined high academic achievement as acting White. These students are clearly alienated from the school’s culture and have wrongly defined good grades and excellent performance as belonging to another group besides their own. These students recognize that knowledge is not the property of any group and getting good grades is not acting White. All groups in this nation have had many people

that have excelled academically. As one university professor remarked, “Let nothing that is human be alien to you.” This message that knowledge belongs to all of us must reach more of our students who feel academically dispossessed.

A number of factors make for the best learning environments for all students:

1. Students have teachers who are subject-matter competent and versatile in their teaching methods.
2. Students' home cultures and languages are valued and respected by school staff.
3. Teachers have high expectations of all students and are willing to provide the necessary assistance or modifications to reach high goals.
4. Schools emphasize the acquisition of broad knowledge as well as verbal and quantitative skills.
5. Parents of all of a school's constituencies have a proportional influence in school policymaking.
6. School staff establishes a personal bond of caring and monitoring student success.

When these characteristics are present in abundance, students of all backgrounds are much more likely to thrive. While administrators play a key role in setting the climate where the characteristics above may thrive, they can't do it without significant support from teachers. In any educational institution, it is the faculty that is mainly responsible for the academic climate as well as creating the atmosphere that allows students to feel comfortable learning.

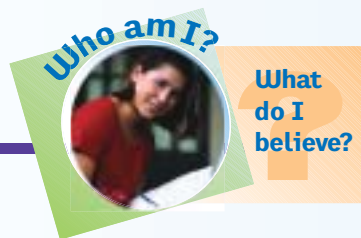
## FINAL THOUGHTS

This chapter has examined changes in the student population and issues that affect the ability of a wide range of students attain an equitable education. Students are becoming more diverse requiring teachers to be more multiculturally aware than ever before in order to be effective. Some may view this as an imposition, while others look at it as a professional challenge that will enable them to better meet the needs of an ever-changing student population.

Social problems are always issues that concern educators particularly because they interfere with students' welfare and academic achievement. While public schools cannot eradicate all social problems, educators can work with other governmental and community agencies to help students overcome many of life's challenges. What could be more rewarding than having a student tell a teacher, “If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be graduating.” For some students facing significant social problems, teachers may be some of the few stable adults in their lives. It is quite natural that teachers serve as mentors for all students, but particularly for students with social problems. When many Americans are asked who have been the most important people in your life outside of your family members, a common answer is “teachers”. Few occupations have this type of influence.

Schools often struggle with resource issues and the decentralized nature of American education makes it difficult to make wholesale changes or to generate a similar product. Over the years, students, parents and educators have worked to achieve equity in education. This notion of equity in education is a journey, not a destination. All forces in society are not always aligned behind this goal. The public dialogue does not always reflect this. Resources are always an issue in education and which students enjoy the limited resources in education will always generate debate.

Special education is an effort to bring the most appropriate education and teachers with specific training to assist students with special needs. Whether this occurs in a general classroom or in special education classrooms, care should be taken to insure that students with a special education designation are appropriately placed and that no cultural or other



## REFLECTIONS

### Professional Plan for Working with Today's Students

Develop your professional action plan by completing the following worksheet:

- I. List the three main ideas you learned in this chapter about students in U.S. schools.
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
- II. List two points raised in this chapter that you would like to know more about.
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_

Check the methods you will use to learn more about this topic

- \_\_\_\_\_ Reading the following book club choices.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Reading sources in the chapters on subjects that interest me.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewing students and asking them what aspects of the education they encounter today are effective or ineffective.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Exploring the following web sites in the Log On section.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Talking to teachers and observing classrooms to see how teachers attempt to reach students with different backgrounds and interests.
- III. What will you include in your Touch the Future portfolio? (List various features in this book or other materials assigned by your instructor.)

bias plays a part in their placement. When students of a particular racial or ethnic group are disproportionately placed in special education classes, this should be seen as a warning sign to examine placement procedures. Special education designations should also be periodically reviewed to insure they are still accurate and do not become life-long labels.

While the promise of education is held out to all students, a brief look at the outcomes in American education shows that all students are not profiting equally. As this nation moves into the twenty-first century, it will need students of color, immigrant students, and linguistic minorities to be fairly represented among the highly educated segments of American society. Therefore, the appropriate education of racial and linguistic minority students is far more than simply the fair thing to do. Failure to have these students achieve at a level commensurate with their peers will have negative consequences for the nation's future.

Education represents the single most important variable that individuals control for personal and economic betterment. Education represents a journey. It should not be a super-highway for some and a two-lane road filled with potholes for others. One thing that unites educators of all types is: students. Their success is the ultimate test of a school's mission.

## SUMMARY

### What Demographic and Social Changes Are Occurring in Schools?

- The overall student population in the United States is increasing at about a 5 percent rate until 2013.
- Some areas of the United States will be experiencing increases in the number of students while others will be showing losses.
- Racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is increasing among U.S. students.
- More students are coming from blended families rather than only the traditional nuclear family.
- Social problems such as drugs, alcohol, and teenage pregnancy retard academic progress.
- Successful teachers must be resilient and recognize social issues their students face in order to learn.

### Have All Students Found Equitable Education?

- A school may have an overall rating of excellent and fail to reach all types of students that attend it.
- Certified and high quality teachers are not evenly distributed across all public schools in a district, state, or the nation.
- While most states have formulas to try to alleviate funding differences in public schools, significant disparities still exist.
- Special education students are guaranteed a “free and appropriate education” in the “least restrictive environment” by PL 94-142.
- Disproportional placement of students from some minority groups in special education programs remains a contentious issue.
- The No Child Left Behind law requires schools to report the adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all categories of students and the targets increase with time.

### Are Student Accountability and Equity Complementary or Competing Interests?

- Advocates of high-stakes testing suggest that schools raise the bar every year to improve student performance.
- Opponents of high-stakes testing argue that financial resources and teacher quality must be equal if we are to hold all students to similar standards.
- Special education students should be taught in “the least restrictive environment.”
- Inclusion is the practice of educating special education students in the regular classroom rather than in separate special education classrooms.
- There is a disproportionate placement of minority students in many special education classrooms.
- Giftedness may be defined as a high IQ score or as outstanding ability in one field.

### What Educational Options Are Best for Racial or Linguistic Minority Students?

- Ability grouping of students often results in the lower groups being stigmatized.
- Immigrant students are often expected to complete academic work in English before they have had a full opportunity to master academic English.
- Two-way immersion (bilingual) programs are relatively rare in U.S. schools despite the support for these programs in the research.
- About 80 percent of U.S. schools engage in some form of tracking students.
- Students who feel alienated by a school's culture often act out with oppositional behavior against the school or school authorities.

## KEY WORDS

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) 137	Inclusion 141	Opportunity to learn 147
Equal treatment, 132	Individualized education plan (IEP) 140	Resiliency 131
Equitable treatment 132	Least restrictive environment 140	Resiliency mentors 131
Free and appropriate education 140	Limited English Proficiency 147	Tracking 145
High-stakes testing 136	Neighborhood schools 147	Two-way immersion (TWI) 147

## CONCEPT REVIEW

1. Identify the areas of the United States that are experiencing the greatest gains in public school students.
2. Explain what has happened to the high school dropout rate in the past decades.
3. Compare how the racial and ethnic nature of the public school student population is changing with earlier patterns that existed in U.S. schools.
4. Identify changes in the family structure and socioeconomic backgrounds of U.S. students and analyze how these patterns affect schools.
5. Explain which social problems involving students tend to be more common in which school environments.
6. Define various conceptions of "excellence in education."
7. Choose at least three issues involving "equity in education" and analyze the significance of each.
8. Explain how the decentralized nature of U.S. public schools contributes to differences in funding levels.
9. Identify the rights that special education students have and know why schools cannot legally segregate special education students from the general student population.
10. Summarize the reasons why gifted programs exist and identify some concerns about gifted programs.
11. Explain reasons for/against the grouping and tracking of students.
12. Identify patterns of access to well qualified teachers in schools serving different socioeconomic populations.
13. Identify at least three characteristics of schools with the best learning environments.
14. Explain the potential of the teaching profession in shaping the lives of students.

## TOUCH THE FUTURE

### Read On

*Against the Odds: How "At Risk" Students Exceed Expectations*

Janine Bempechat (1998) Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

This source gives the reader some insight into school success under trying circumstances.

*Meeting the Needs of Multiethnic and Multiracial Children in Schools*

Francis Wardle and Marta I. Cruz-Janzen (2004) Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

Excellent guidance for teachers to understand students of multiracial backgrounds. The authors explain racial identity as well as provide suggestions that show how to avoid miscategorizing people.

*Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*

Maryellen Weimer (2002) Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Practical suggestions for moving instruction from a teacher- to a learner-centered approach.

*Urban Teaching: The Essentials*

Lois Weiner (1999) Teacher's College Press, New York.

Keen insights into the urban teaching experience as well as suggestions for teachers working in urban schools.

**Log On**

Native American Culture

[www.ewebtribe.com/NACulture/](http://www.ewebtribe.com/NACulture/)

This site provides information about various aspects of Native American culture including education, social issues, belief systems and traditions.

Muslim Life in America

<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/muslimlife>

This is a very informative site regarding American Muslims. It provides facts, perspectives, and an opportunity for dialogue.

Retanet: Resources for Teaching About the Americas

<http://ladb.unm.edu/retanet/plans/>

This source provides lesson plans and information about various Latin American cultures.

Smithsonian Institution: African American History and Culture

[www.si.edu/resource/faq/nmah/afroam.htm](http://www.si.edu/resource/faq/nmah/afroam.htm)

The Smithsonian's comprehensive site has links to information about African American culture, history, children's stories, and much more.

**Write On***"I am always willing to learn, but I do not always like being taught."*

Sir Winston Churchill

In your journal, respond to the following questions:

Explain what you think Winston Churchill meant by this statement. Write a brief essay explaining whether or not current students would agree with this statement and what this means for teachers.

**OBSERVATION GUIDE****TEACH: LINKING THEORY TO PRACTICE**

Part of your informed decision about teaching needs to come from your own desire to explore all aspects of teaching. The following interview and observation guide will help you while completing practical field experiences or during regular visits to schools.

## Interviewing Current Students

School: (Use code Name) \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

Student: (Use Code Name) \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Interview Began: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Ended: \_\_\_\_\_

Objective: to explore students perspectives about effective teaching

Inquiry Question: *Who are today's students and what issues motivate them?*

Directions: Work with your professor to locate a school where you might be welcomed to speak with students, or arrange to speak with young children you know personally. If working with a local school, call the teacher to set up an appointment, then use these questions as a guide or create your own. Interview at least three students and then write a short essay comparing and contrasting student responses to the questions below. Make it clear to the student before beginning your interview that you don't want any references to teachers' names. The important thing to record is the students' perceptions.

Share and compare your interview with other members of the class to identify the common themes related to understanding today's students.

1. Think of the best teacher you ever had. What two things did that teacher do to deserve being regarded as your best teacher?





2. When teachers are presenting a lesson, what two or three things do they do that tend to confuse you?
3. What do teachers do when presenting a lesson that you find most helpful?
4. How useful are the examples teachers use? Please provide an example that helped you understand and one that did not.
5. How important is the way you feel in a class in order to learn properly?
6. What advice would you give future teachers you may have that would result in you being very comfortable in their classes?

### Connecting with INTASC: Principle 2

Knowledge of Human Development and Learning: The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development.

Speak with a K-12 teacher and find out what s/he does to meet Principle 2.

- How does the teacher identify and incorporate children's backgrounds into daily lessons?
- How does the teacher interact with students in a way that is sensitive to each one's personal needs?

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