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6

The Place of Schools in Society

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading and studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Analyze the purposes of schools and how they contribute to the socialization of children and youth. (InTASC 3: Learning Environments)
2. Examine culture, its characteristics, and its impact in schools. (InTASC 2: Learning Differences)
3. Evaluate the school choices available to parents in a growing number of school districts. (InTASC 3: Learning Environment)
4. Explain why schools have evolved into different structures based on students' age. (InTASC 1: Learner Development)
5. Explore how the place in which students live impacts their education. (InTASC 3: Learning Environments)

EDUCATION in the News

IN OUR OPINION: GROWTH OF CHARTER SCHOOLS IS POSITIVE SIGN FOR EDUCATION

Deseret News Editorial

When Utah's first charter school opened its doors in 1999, its future, along with a handful of other charters that opened within the next few years, was very much in doubt. The educational establishment was fiercely critical of this new movement, and some predicted that charter schools were little more than a fad that would fade away in a short period of time.

Well, that was then, and this is now. Charter schools currently are experiencing a huge groundswell of support. There are 109 charters in operation across the state, with a dozen more scheduled to open their doors in the next two years. Student growth in the state rose 1.5 percent, but charter enrollment has surged 11 percent over the same time period. Clearly, parents and students now recognize them as a viable alternative to traditional public schools, and that's an encouraging sign.

Of course, parental interest isn't the only standard by which these schools are measured. Some insist that charter schools are unnecessary at best and an unwelcome diversion of taxpayer resources at worst. Studies have been conducted to determine the academic success of charter schools, and the numbers suggest that

there really isn't a vast difference between the performance of charter students versus that of those who attend their neighborhood schools. Such statistics provide valuable information. But those statistics don't tell the whole story.

The enrollment numbers in charter schools, along with the long waiting lists of those who are trying to get in, are indicative of the high level of satisfaction among those who attend them. It has been historically true that many who go to their neighborhood schools have done so primarily out of inertia. Put simply, kids didn't have any other choice. Consequently, it's much easier to maintain high enrollment numbers if there are no other options.

Those days are long gone, and the educational landscape has irrevocably changed. Nobody who attends a charter school is compelled to be there. The charter schools themselves are keenly aware of this new reality, and the onus is on them to provide an educational experience sufficient to attract students. At the same time, traditional schools are no longer able to take their students for granted. All of this redounds to the students' benefit.

That's not to say that competition has cured everything that ails our public schools, nor is it a suggestion that the charter movement doesn't still face a number of challenges going forward. However, the fact that so many willingly embrace charter schools is a solid indication that they must be doing something right.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are your impressions of the charter schools that have been established in your community or state?

2. What are arguments made in support of and against the establishment of charter schools?
3. What does research indicate about the effectiveness of charter schools versus traditional schools in terms of the academic performance of students?

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PURPOSES OF SCHOOLS

Private schools and academies were first established in colonial days for the children of the elite. However, that did not mean that other children were not being educated as they worked with adults. When possible, low-income families were sending their children to the homes of neighbors where mothers or other women in the home would teach them how to read. It was not until the 1800s that public schools began to include children of families who were not affluent. Even so, children were not required to attend school for another century. One of the goals of these early common schools was to mix students from different socioeconomic groups. The curricula focused on teaching children to read the Bible, develop high morals, and become a good citizen.

Today's schools play many roles in society beyond those for which the common schools were designed. They teach the basic skills of literacy and computation, but they also reflect society's high ideals such as universal education for all children. What should students be taught? Should we prepare students with the knowledge and skills they will need for their future jobs? Should they learn to think for themselves, even questioning some of what they are taught? Should we teach them the dispositions that will help them be good citizens, be respectful of others, and make sound decisions about their life? Should they learn to appreciate the arts, be healthy and active adults, and live effectively in a global, interdependent world? Should all students take the same courses, or should they have a choice, allowing some to be prepared for jobs immediately after high school?

Our own philosophical and political perspectives help determine our views of the roles of schools and the definition of a good education. Citizens and educators alike disagree on whether schools should primarily support democratic equality, **social efficiency**, **social mobility**, or some other goal. Advocates of democratic equality view education as a public good through which all students should be exposed to a liberal arts education and learn to be productive citizens in a democracy. Proponents of social efficiency believe that schools should serve the private sector by preparing students for their optimal role in society as determined by testing or other measures. People who support social mobility view education as an asset that can be accumulated and used for social competition. Achieving these credentials provides us a competitive advantage in securing a desirable position in society as can be seen in the higher salaries and prestige that most college graduates receive.

School boards, educators, parents, and communities have their own beliefs and perspectives about the primary roles of schools. Their beliefs may be based on their political stances, national reports calling for the reform of education, or their own experiences in schools. Through such reports as well as discussions and debates among educators, policy makers, and others, society continually refines and redefines its ideas about schools. The five roles described in the following section are a sample of those most often mentioned by educators and the public. Most schools address each of these roles, but in any given school or community, one goal may receive prominence over others. As you read the roles outlined below, think about your own views regarding the roles of schools in society.

Social efficiency An ideology that is based on the scientific techniques of industry and the belief that the primary purpose of schools should be to prepare students for their optimal role in society as determined by tests or other measures.

Social mobility The movement of an individual or family up or down in social class such as moving from the lower class to middle class as one finishes college and earns a higher income.

JOURNAL FOR REFLECTION 6.1

Which of the following ideals do you think schools should mirror? Why?

- Be a model of our best hopes for society and a mechanism for remaking society in the image of those hopes.
- Adapt students to the needs of society by preparing them for specific roles and jobs.
- Serve the individual hopes and ambitions of students and parents.

Academic Achievement

One of the major purposes for attending schools is to learn academic content. State and national standards provide the framework for what students should know and be able to do to be academically proficient. Standards exist not only in academic areas, but also for the arts, health, and physical education. The Common Core Standards, which were developed by the National Governors Association and the Council for Chief State School Officers (2010), were created to help students become successful in college and careers. They identify the essential required levels of knowledge and skills in English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects as well as mathematics. National tests assess students' attainment of those proficiencies. Schools have revised their curricula to be standards based, knowing that their students will be tested annually to determine if they are at grade level. School systems' reputations and their state funding are dependent on how well students perform on these tests.

Schools, teachers, and principals are held accountable for student achievement based on their students' performance on standardized tests. Parents and students know when testing days are scheduled. Teachers and principals know that their future employment could depend on how their students score on the state tests. Television stations and news reporters cover a school's preparation for the testing days in local communities. Teachers prepare students to take the tests, sometimes teaching to tests and neglecting subjects that are not being tested such as social studies, science, and the arts.

Media reports of student scores on achievement tests highlight a school's ability to offer students a strong academic background. Some school districts base their reputations on how well their students perform on these tests and how many students are admitted to colleges. In some communities, parents camp out overnight to be first in line to enroll their children in a preschool that will hopefully provide the jump start needed for success on future tests to ensure later admission to prestigious colleges and universities.

Workforce Readiness

Preparing students to contribute to the economic growth of the nation has been a major purpose of schools for over a century (Cuban, 2011). In a survey of chief executive officers (CEOs), The Business Council and The Conference Board (2013) found that more than nine in ten of these leaders cite education as "very" or "most important" in both maintaining a competitive national economy and reducing income inequality. The importance of education is reflected in workforce projections that indicate 65 percent of U.S. jobs will require postsecondary education by 2020 (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013).

The current sense of crisis regarding students not being prepared to work effectively in the market-driven global economy has its roots in the U.S. Department of Education's release of the report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. The education system has been blamed for students not performing at the top of international tests of knowledge and skills, for students not developing the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed for a growing number of jobs, and for not preparing enough students in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. While business executives generally believe that U.S. high schools and colleges could better prepare the needed workforce, they also believe that these education institutions, especially four-year colleges and universities, deliver "better overall workplace results than other countries" (The Business Council and The Conference Board, 2013).

What are the skills that are most important to employers? More than one hundred U.S. CEOs identified the following skills as the most important:

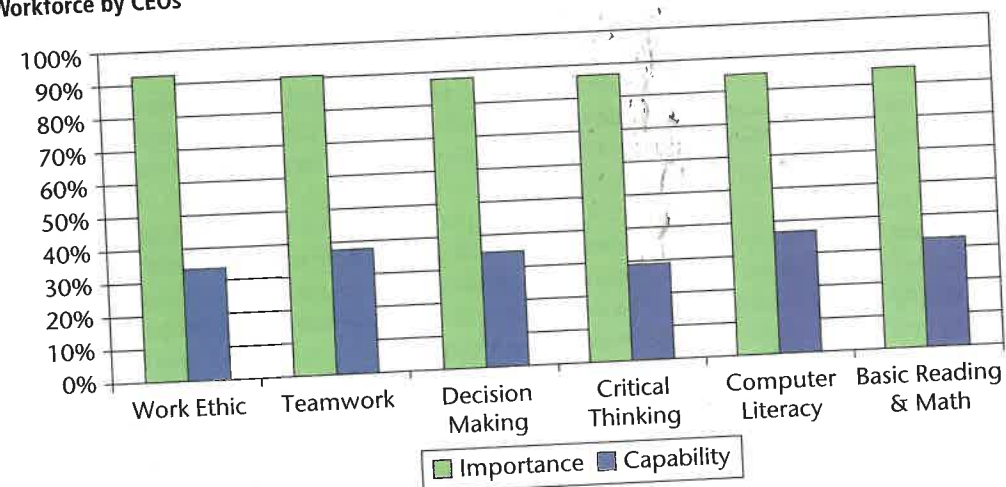
1. Work ethics
2. Teamwork
3. Decision making
4. Critical thinking
5. Computer literacy
6. Basic reading and mathematics (The Business Council & The Conference Board, 2013)

These business executives rate the capabilities of the workforce on these skills as less than desirable as shown in Figure 6.1. Interestingly, they rate the creativity and motivation of the U.S. workforce higher than other skills and the mechanical skills and physical health of the workforce the lowest.

Business owners and the nation's leaders also worry that not enough engineers, computer scientists, and other workers in the STEM professions are being produced by high schools and colleges to meet the needs of the country. The production of U.S. students in these areas has fallen behind that of other nations (The Business Council & The Conference Board, 2013).

What should be the role of schools in preparing today's youth for the workforce? Is it to ensure that students have the knowledge and skills to keep the economy competitive in a changing world where new jobs continually emerge? Is it to help students learn a trade, learn how to learn, or learn how to take orders and follow the rules? These questions are particularly important when conditions are changing as rapidly as they are in today's society. The vocation for which one is prepared initially may become obsolete within a few years. The *Framework for 21st Century Learning* (P21 Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2015), which is supported by many business leaders, calls for today's students to master the basic core subjects and develop global awareness; civic literacy; health literacy; environmental literacy; and financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy. To prepare for the complex work and life environments of the future, students need to develop skills for creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem solving; and communication and collaboration. They also must have information, media, and technology skills to work effectively in today's workforce. The emerging economy will also require workers who are competent in more than one language, can make appropriate health and wellness choices, and are creative and innovative. Meeting all of these expectations is a major challenge for schools.

FIGURE 6.1 Ratings of the Importance of Skills Compared to the Perceived Capability of the U.S. Workforce by CEOs



Source: Based on The Business Council & The Conference Board. (2013, May). The Business Council Survey of CEOs in collaboration with The Conference Board. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.thebusinesscouncil.org/assets/TCB_BCS_MAY_2013.pdf
http://www.thebusinesscouncil.org/assets/TCB_BCS_MAY_2013.pdf

Citizenship

Citizenship is much more than voting in elections and knowing facts about the nation's history, heroines, and heroes. "It requires citizens who are informed and thoughtful, participate in their communities, are involved in the political process, and possess moral and civic virtues" (From *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*. Published by National Council for the Social Studies, © 2011.) Developing citizens to participate in a democracy has been a core purpose of public schools from their inception. This civic mission prepares students to understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The result of effective civic learning is citizens who are more likely to vote and discuss politics as well as to volunteer to work on community projects. They are also "more confident in their ability to speak publicly and communicate with their elected representatives" (Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics, University of Pennsylvania, & Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011, p. 6).

Preparing students to be active citizens includes involving them actively in the democratic process as part of their school experience. The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools has identified the following six proven practices for civic learning:

1. *Classroom instruction*, including courses in government, history, economics, law, and democracy that are not lectures but that encourage the active engagement of students.
2. *Discussion of current events and controversial issues* that includes issues important and relevant to the lives of young people.
3. *Service learning* that provides students opportunities for community service linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.
4. *Extracurricular activities* that allow students to be involved outside of the classroom in the school or community.
5. *School governance* that allows students to practice democracy.
6. *Simulations of democratic processes* such as voting during elections and participating in debates and trials. (Six Proven Practices for Civic Learning from *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*. Copyright © 2011 by National Council for the Social Studies. Used by permission of National Council for the Social Studies.)

More than one in five of the eligible voter population is between eighteen and twenty-nine years old. The common misconception is that the 2008 national election saw a record turnout from Millennials, but in reality, only 52 percent of them actually voted, which was higher than their 1996 low of 37 percent but just barely above the long-term pattern of 50 percent. The problem is that half of this population does not vote, which is among the lowest rate of youth involvement in the world. There are some positive signs of their engagement in civic affairs. Young people are volunteering for community activities at higher levels and are using social media for civic engagement (National Conference on Citizenship, 2013). Teachers can serve as models of desirable civic behavior through their engagement in community and political activities locally, nationally, or internationally.

Civics—along with economics, geography, and history—is one of the disciplines that the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (2013) recommends be included in social studies programs. The civics envisioned by NCSS

requires knowledge of the history, principles, and foundations of our American democracy, and the ability to participate in civic and democratic processes. People demonstrate civic engagement when they address public problems individually and collaboratively and when they maintain, strengthen, and improve communities and societies. Thus, civics is, in part, the study of how people participate in governing society. (From *College, Career & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards*. Published by National Council for the Social Studies, © 2013.)

Citizenship cannot be taught in a single civics course. Across courses and in school activities, school officials and teachers work

Applying citizenship skills occurs when young people become actively involved in campaigning for candidates during local, state, and national elections.



to develop democratic citizens who respect others; believe in human dignity; are concerned about and care for others; and fight for justice, fairness, and tolerance. Students can learn through practice in the classroom how to be active, involved citizens.

VIDEO NOTE 6.1

Watch this video about a survey of civics education and the challenge of teaching citizenship in a testing environment. How important is it for students to learn about citizenship in school?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=et1XzfNHg7w>

Social Development

Schooling also provides opportunities for students to develop their social skills by interacting with others. In this process, students should learn to respect others. They also learn a set of rules for working appropriately with peers and adults. Although schools usually do not provide a course that teaches skills in social development, appropriate behavior is constantly reinforced by teachers and other school professionals in the classroom and on the playground.

Teachers can give students opportunities to work with other students from diverse racial, gender, language, religious, and ability groups. One of the by-products of these interactions is that students learn more about their similarities and differences. Teachers can encourage interactions across groups through **cooperative learning** activities in which students from different groups work together in small groups. Teachers design activities in which students who might not otherwise seek one another out work together. A part of teaching is helping students learn to collaborate with and support each other, which is one of the twenty-first century skills students should be developing.

Cooperative learning

An instructional strategy for grouping students from different groups and learning abilities to work collaboratively on projects and assignments.

Culture Socially transmitted ways of thinking, believing, feeling, and acting within a group of people that are passed from one generation to the next.

Hidden curricula

The implicit values and expectations that teachers and schools convey about what is important for students to learn.

Values Principles, standards, and qualities that are considered worthwhile or desirable.

Dominant culture The values, traditions, history, experiences, and behaviors that are common to the dominant cultural group in a society.

Cultural Transmission

Schools around the world transmit the **culture** of their nation to young people so they can both maintain it and pass it on to the next generation. Schools have often approached this task by teaching history with an emphasis on important events and heroes. This emphasis helps children learn the importance of patriotism and loyalty. Formal and **hidden curricula** reflect and reinforce the **values** of the national culture—the principles, standards, and qualities the culture endorses.

These national values and rules are so embedded in schooling that most teachers and students do not realize they exist. The only exceptions may be students who do not feel a part of the **dominant culture** or whose families have recently immigrated. In these cases, students and families quickly learn that schools might not reflect or support aspects of their culture that differ from the dominant culture. This dissonance between schools and families is most noticeable for students who are not European American or whose native language is not English. Students from religious backgrounds that have not evolved from Judeo-Christian roots may also question the culture that is being transmitted at school. The challenge for educators is to transmit the commonalities across cultures while including the richness and contributions of the diverse cultures in the United States. In this way, schools begin to change and expand the dominant culture.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 6.1

Complete Check Your Understanding 6.1 to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SCHOOLS

Culture provides a blueprint for how we think, feel, and behave in a society. It imposes rules and order to help us understand the subtleties of our shared language, nonverbal communications,

and ways of thinking and knowing. We have the same biological and psychological needs no matter where we live in the world, but the ways we meet those needs are culturally determined. The location of the group, available resources, and traditions have a great influence on how and what we eat, how we groom and dress, how we teach and learn, and how we interact with each other.

Culture is learned, shared, adapted, and dynamic. We learn our culture through **enculturation**, which occurs when parents, grandparents, religious leaders, teachers, television shows, and our neighbors teach us the culture and its acceptable norms of behavior. We internalize cultural patterns so well and so early in life that we often have difficulty accepting different—but equally appropriate—ways of behaving and thinking by others, sometimes leading to miscommunications and misunderstandings in society and the classroom. When schools use a different language or linguistic pattern from that used at the home of students, or when students' behaviors have different meanings at home than at school, dissonance between schools and the home can occur (Gay, 2010). Understanding cultural differences and learning to recognize when students do not share our own cultural patterns are critical steps in the provision of an equitable learning environment.

Culture is not stagnant. It is dynamic, continually adapting to serve the needs of a group. We adapt our culture as we move from one section of the country to another or around the globe as do some of our students who are new immigrants or whose families are in the armed services. Cultures differ, in part, because of the geographic region in which we live. For example, Eskimos who live with extreme cold, snow, and ice have developed different cultural patterns than groups in the South Pacific islands with limited land and an unlimited body of water. Technological changes in the world and society also transform cultures. For example, technology has allowed robots to perform routine jobs and has provided opportunities for more people to work remotely from home.

Dominant Culture

The legal system, democratic elections, and middle-class values of American society, which serve as the foundation for many of our institutions and traditions, are based on the western and northern European traditions. Over time, a common or shared culture has evolved from the many cultures that voluntary and involuntary immigrants have brought from around the world. The dominant culture today is reflected primarily in the ways many middle-class families live. These commonalities make it fairly easy for people to identify us as “American” when we visit other countries regardless of our unique ethnic heritages.

The dominant culture had its beginnings in the cultures of the white, middle-class Protestants who began immigrating to the colonies from western and northern Europe five centuries ago. Until recently, the ancestors of these early settlers dominated the country's political system, holding the highest government and corporate positions. In this role, they had great influence over the institutional policies and practices that maintained their power. The Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s and 1970s opened the political and corporate worlds to a growing number of women and persons of color. During this period, the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act were passed to protect the rights of all people and to promote greater equality across groups in education, housing, and other areas. Our history as a nation of many diverse groups and our experiences in struggling for equality across groups has led to the dominant culture changing over time to reflect some of the values, contributions, and histories of the groups who immigrated in large numbers over the past century.

What are some of the characteristics of the common culture? Universal education and literacy for all citizens are valued. Our job or career is important in being recognized as successful. Fun is usually a relief from work. Technology in all of its forms, from cell phones to the computer, has a great impact on our lives, especially those of young people. Achievement and success are highly valued and demonstrated by the accumulation of material goods such as houses, cars, boats, clothes, and vacations.

Individualism and **freedom** are core values that undergird the dominant culture of the United States. Independence and self-reliance are the major focus of individualism in which toughness and strength are admired. Freedom is a cornerstone of democracy but is generally defined as having control of our own destiny and success with little or no interference by others, especially by government. To some people, freedom means being able to live where they want,

Enculturation The process of learning the characteristics and behaviors of the culture of the group to which one belongs.

Individualism Value based on independence and self-reliance in which toughness and strength are admired.

Freedom The right to control one's own life with little or no interference by others.

do what they want, believe what they want, and improve their material conditions as they see fit. To others, freedom has a more political tone: the freedom of speech, the freedom to protest, and the freedom to have one's rights respected. These two concepts often take precedence over an individual's responsibility for community and the common good (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 2008).

Cultures of Families

Although the dominant culture is reflected in schools and at work, a family's unique culture usually takes precedence in our homes. Students arrive at school with the traditions, language, and behaviors of their families' cultures. Their **ethnicity** (for example, African American, Navajo, Serbian American, or Korean American) may be their primary cultural identification. They may speak a language other than English at home. Families also range along a continuum from poor to wealthy, which can affect students' health and well-being and their ability to engage effectively in school. Families may also be greatly influenced by the discrimination they face because of their race, ethnicity, immigration status, language, religion, or sexual orientation. Some families will feel that their cultures are not valued by the school or society.

Knowing more about your students' cultures can help you make schooling and the curriculum more real and authentic for them. It also shows that you respect their families and communities. How can you know more about the cultures of your students and the communities in which they live? You could participate in community activities and celebrations that will provide an understanding of students' cultural traditions. You could volunteer with community groups to coach, tutor, or serve food at a homeless shelter. You could actively participate in school activities in the evenings and on the weekends to interact more with students and their parents. Another approach to learning more about the cultures of your students is to take classes in ethnic studies, women's studies, religious studies, sociology, or anthropology to build your knowledge base. You could read books and watch movies written and directed by people from cultural groups with whom you have little knowledge or experience. To help you think about the role of diversity training, two teachers' views are presented in the "Differing Perspectives?" feature.

When we meet our students for the first time, we usually identify them immediately by their gender and race, and maybe their ethnicity. We may not know their religion and its importance to their families unless they are wearing clothing or jewelry associated with a specific religion. We may not know the importance of their ethnicity or language. Therefore, we need to be very careful not to stereotype them based on factors that can be easily identified. Culture is far more complex and important in a student's identity than we can know without much more information.

Cultural Values

Although schools are expected to transmit the culture of the United States to the younger generation, educators do not always agree on *whose* culture should be transmitted. Is it always the dominant culture even though diverse racial, ethnic, language, and religious groups have their own cultures with different traditions, experiences, and histories? How can schools begin to accommodate all of these differences?

Some conservative politicians and pundits argue that schools should ignore diversity. They believe that all students should learn the common heritage and adopt the dominant culture as their own. Multicultural theorists and educators present another perspective. They argue that student diversity enriches the school community and society. They believe in a pluralistic approach in which cultural differences are valued and integrated throughout the curriculum and all activities of the school. In this approach, teachers draw on the cultural backgrounds and experiences of students to teach academic knowledge and skills.

Parents' choices of schools—including religious schools, home schooling, or **ethnocentric schools** that build the curriculum around the histories and experiences of the family's ethnic group—have been based in part on the values that they believe education can impart. Although schools usually do not offer a course in which values are explicitly presented and discussed, values

Ethnicity A shared national origin or the national origin of one's ancestors when they immigrated to the United States.

Ethnocentric schools The curriculum is designed around the histories and experiences of an ethnic group. Afrocentric schools and tribal schools are the most common examples.

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES

SHOULD TEACHERS BE REQUIRED TO TAKE DIVERSITY TRAINING?

Teachers in U.S. schools are predominantly white even though the majority of students are now students of color. Teachers may have little or no knowledge about the ethnic cultures of the students in their classrooms or the communities in which their school is located. As a result, they may misread the cultural cues of students and not effectively or appropriately incorporate the students' cultures into the learning process. Should all teachers be required to participate in diversity training to develop cultural competence for working effectively with students and their families from multiple cultural backgrounds?

YES

- Students need to know that their teachers respect and accept them, not only on an individual level, but also as members of society. If they don't see themselves in their teachers, students want to know that at least they're understood.
- Diversity training can help educators relate more effectively to students who are different from themselves.
- Teachers need to realize that race has many real consequences for students and communities.
- Teachers need to understand discrimination and know how to confront racism in their classroom and school.
- Teachers should know how to provide social and racial justice for all students.

NO

- An annual update on the groups of students, their home life, and their needs provides necessary and appropriate tools to help teachers work with students from diverse groups.
- Too much professional development related to diversity can be so demeaning, dumbed down, and even insulting, sometimes infuriating the teachers who most need it.
- Diversity training is usually directed at white teachers, but prejudice and ignorance is colorblind.
- A few mandated diversity meetings can fundamentally change classroom behavior.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON THIS ISSUE?

implicitly influence the formal and hidden curriculum. Curricula usually support the dominant culture and the current ideological, political, and economic order of society. However, some families believe that public schools do not value their religion. Some parents do not want their children exposed to the secular values of a public school or what they perceive to be inappropriate language and disrespectful behavior by students. Although these values may not seem controversial to some readers, they can be the cause of extensive debate and emotional pleas at school board meetings and community forums.

The emphasis on individualism and competition prevalent in many schools is not compatible with the cooperative patterns practiced by many cultural groups. These differences among groups can lead to conflict between parents and schools and among groups within a community. Families turn to the courts when they believe that schools have acted inappropriately. They may believe that the schools do not use a democratic process in which they can be heard or that the community will not support their petitions because they hold a minority position. School prayer, creationism, the banning of books, sex education, segregation, bullying, and discrimination are among the areas that have been tested in the courts.

JOURNAL FOR REFLECTION 6.2

- How does your family describe your cultural background?
- What characteristics about your culture, if any, were valued in school?
- What characteristics of students from ethnic, language, or religious backgrounds different from your own were valued in school?



Source: Michael Chamberlin/Fotolia

Competition in athletics and other extracurricular activities reflects the traditions and values of a school's culture.

Because parents and other groups in a community may vehemently disagree about the values to be reinforced in schools, teachers should be aware of their own cultural values. Knowing your own values as well as those of the families represented in the school should help you prevent potential conflicts. Expectations can vary greatly from one community or school to another. When a controversial topic, program, or book is being initiated in the classroom, good communications with families will be critical in making the transition smoothly.

Culture of Schools

A school also has a culture that generally reflects the nation's dominant culture and the community in which it is located. A school's culture, which is sometimes referred to as the school climate or ethos, provides meaning for its students, teachers, school officials, and parents. Schools have their own unwritten rules and norms for behavior, including how students interact with the teachers and each other. They develop their own traditions and rituals related to athletics, extracurricular clubs, graduation exercises, school social events, and the ways teachers interact with each other and parents. They have mascots, cheerleaders, school colors, and school songs that distinguish them from other schools. Over time, they have developed reputations for the academic achievement of their students or the prowess of their football, basketball, or other sports

teams. They also develop reputations for the establishment of a safe or dangerous environment. Some schools are influenced greatly by the religions and cultures of the children's families, others by the presence of a university or large military base.

The cultural patterns that develop in a school can have a powerful impact on the academic performance of students and the ways that teachers feel about their work and students. The culture of some schools is very supportive of academic achievement with expectations that all students will attend postsecondary education. Educators in those schools work together to meet that goal, parental support is solicited, and the community celebrates academic performance. Other schools champion an inclusive culture that fosters equity, caring, collaboration, and academic growth for all of its students. Other schools develop cultures in which students and educators value and support the arts, character education, religious orientations, or the whole child's development. Unfortunately, some schools have toxic cultures that do not respect students or value parental and community cultures.

Students and teachers are more likely to want to be in school and engaged in learning and teaching when the culture is positive and supportive. Characteristics of positive school cultures include high expectations for student learning, safe and caring environments, shared values and trust, powerful pedagogy and curriculum, high motivation and engagement, family and community partnerships, and a professional faculty community (Character Education Partnership, 2010). Teachers and school leaders are key in developing and maintaining the cultures that help students learn and care about learning.

VIDEO NOTE 6.2



Watch this video about changing the school culture to respect the cultures and languages of families. What steps would you take to ensure that you are respecting the cultures of your students and their families?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15-NygKcQr8>

Schools develop histories and memories that are transferred from generation to generation. Some students become the school leaders, fitting easily into the school culture. Some thrive in a cultural environment where they are popular and have many friends. Other students never seem to fit into the school culture, some because the school culture is very different from their own family's culture and adapting to the school culture causes dissonance at home. Other students feel marginalized and alienated, which may lead to their leaving school before graduation. As a result, some graduates have very positive memories of their schools and retain lifelong feelings of pride about them. Others remember never fitting in and never being understood by their peers and teachers.



CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 6.2

Complete Check Your Understanding 6.2 to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

SCHOOL CHOICES

Until recently, parents had no say in which school their children would attend unless a private school was nearby and affordable. Children were assigned to a public school based on their home address. Today, increasing numbers and types of options to the traditional neighborhood public school are available. As shown in Figure 6.2, the parents of one in ten students choose a private school for the education of their children. Other parents are choosing nontraditional schools such as **charter** or **virtual schools**. The problem for many parents now is not whether they have a choice, but which school is best for their children.

Public Schools

The schools that were established after Europeans began to settle the British North American colonies were private and attended only by the children of the elite owners of property. This pattern began to change when Massachusetts required towns with at least fifty families to appoint a teacher and collect taxes to support schools in 1674. Schools were expanded further in 1785 when the Land Ordinance required all new territories north and west of the Ohio River to set aside a parcel of land for a public school in each township. Although the common schools were created in the 1830s for students from families of different social classes, most African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students attended segregated schools if they were in school at all. In many parts of the country, low-income students did not attend school regularly and, when they did, it was often for only a few grades.

The curricula in those early schools focused on teaching the Bible, morals, and citizenship. When immigrant Roman Catholic families expressed concerns about the Protestant Bible being taught in the common schools in 1842, riots erupted in Philadelphia and New York City. When the two sides could not reach agreement on the curricula, the Roman Catholic Church established its own private schools (Spring, 2011). Over time, the public school curricula became more secular.

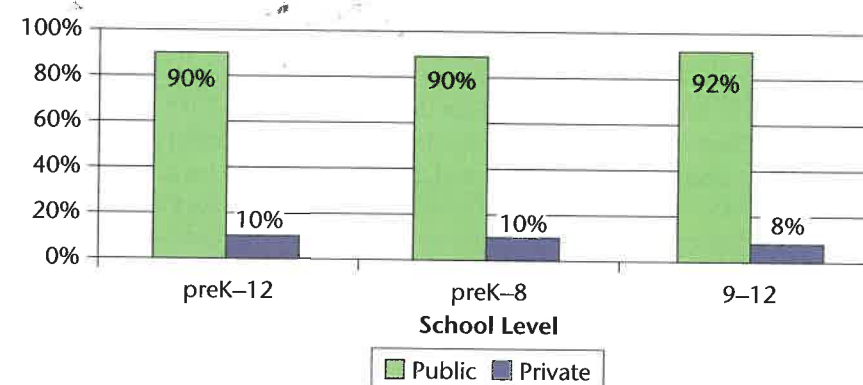
Unlike private schools, public schools do not charge tuition. Until the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, the public school goal for equal education opportunities for all students was an unrealized dream. Even today, many students of color continue not to be well served by their schools. Beginning in the early 1990s, helping all students meet high standards and expectations became another articulated goal for public schools, followed soon by increased accountability for schools and educators to meet that goal as measured by student scores on standardized tests.

Today, not only do children and youth have the right to attend a public school, they are required to attend school until they are sixteen to eighteen years old, depending on the laws of the state in which they live. Almost 50 million students were enrolled in public P-12 schools

Charter schools Public schools established by teachers, parents, non-profit organizations, and others under a contract with the state or local school district. They are exempt from many state and district regulations as they design and deliver programs for improving the academic performance of students.

Virtual schools Education programs offered without the teacher and student being in the same room or location for instruction. Most programs are offered online via web-based technologies.

FIGURE 6.2 Enrollment in Public and Private Schools



Source: From *The Condition of Education 2015* by Grace Kena, Lauren Musu-Gillette, Jennifer Robinson, Xiaolei Wang, Amy Rathbun, Jijun Zhang, Sidney Wilkinson-Flicker, Amy Barner and Erin Dunlop Velez. Published by US Department of Education, © 2015.

in the 2012–2013 school year, and that number is projected to increase to almost 53 million by 2024–2025 (Kena et al., 2015).

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICES. Parents were first offered a choice of public schools that their children could attend when the federal government funded **magnet schools** in the 1980s. In 1990, the state of Wisconsin passed legislation to provide low-income families in Milwaukee the opportunity to use a **voucher** to send their children to a private school. With the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, parents were allowed more options for choosing a school.

Most public school options allow for parent and student involvement in school decision making. All represent, in some way, a break with the traditional public school. The creation of choices also causes competition between schools, which some people believe will lead to more efficiency and effectiveness. However, the research to date, though limited, does not provide clear evidence of a trend toward higher student achievement in nontraditional schools (Ravitch, 2013).

MAGNET SCHOOLS. In the 1960s, some parents were calling for school choice in part to counteract the racially segregated schools that existed across the country. Early alternative schools were opened in Tacoma, Washington in 1968, Boston in 1969, and Minneapolis in 1970. In the early 1970s, Houston called its Performing and Visual Arts School a “magnet school” because it was attracting students from across the city.

Many school districts continued to be pressured by citizens and ordered by the courts to equalize the proportions of students from different racial groups in each school. A growing number of urban school districts developed special academic programs and custom-designed facilities to attract a racially diverse student body from across the city. Many of the magnet schools emphasized a theme such as the performing and visual arts, math and science, or the liberal arts. Whatever the theme, the faculty, and curriculum, students generally choose the magnet school because of their interest in the school’s theme.

CHARTER SCHOOLS. Charter schools have become the most popular option to traditional public schools since the first one opened in Minnesota in 1991. They have been created by academic institutions, nonprofit foundations, teachers, parents, and entrepreneurs for a variety of reasons. These schools include Montessori schools, Edison Schools, experiential learning schools, and Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) academies. Founders of other charter schools have designed curricula and climates that are centered in the ethnic heritages of the students and community. Others have created schools around a particular philosophy that teachers and parents support. Although all charter schools are supposed to provide students with a strong academic background that meets standards, some focus more directly on academics with the goal that most of their students will attend and complete college.

Charter schools are established through a contract with either a state agency (e.g., the state department of education) or a local school board for a specific time period, usually three to five years. The contract, or charter, lays out how the school will operate in exchange for receiving public funding. Charter schools have greater autonomy than traditional public schools and can be released from district and state regulations such as hiring licensed teachers, following the teachers’ union contract, or using the district’s textbooks. However, charter schools are still held accountable for student learning and, in many settings, having a diverse student body.

As of 2015, forty-three states and the District of Columbia had passed legislation to permit the establishment of charter schools (Kerwin, 2015). Arizona, the District of Columbia, Indiana, Michigan, and Minnesota are states with strong charter laws as ranked by the Center for Education Reform (Kerwin, 2015). Charter schools served 2.9 million students in the 2014–2015 school year (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2015). School districts with the largest percentage of charter schools are located in urban areas with 86 percent of the enrollment in the ten districts with the largest percentage of charter schools being students of color (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2015). As shown in Figure 6.3, charter schools are generally smaller than other public schools.

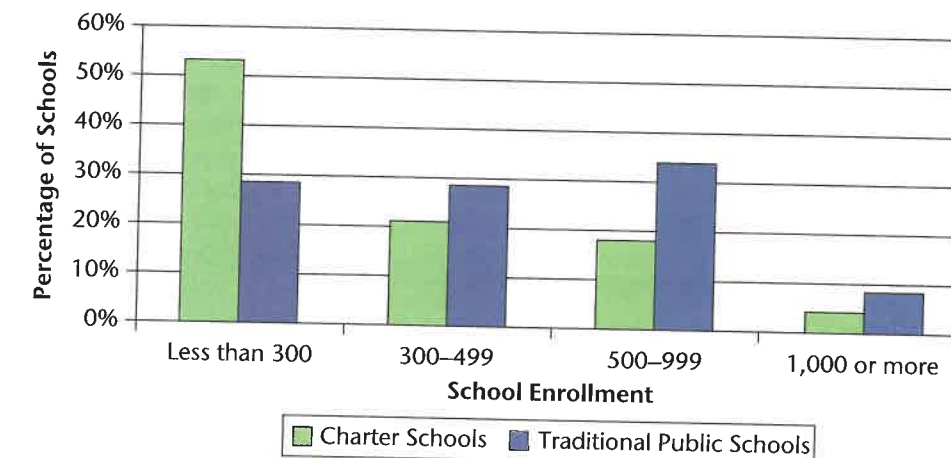
Debates continue about the impact and effectiveness of charter schools. Some critics worry about charter and traditional schools becoming more segregated. Some studies find that charter schools enroll a smaller proportion of children with disabilities than traditional public schools. Research on the effectiveness of charter schools finds that they are improving (Raymond, 2014), but there are still below-par schools. One positive development is that some school districts are

Magnet schools

Public schools with a focused curriculum such as the arts or mathematics and science. These schools are designed to attract a diverse student population from across a school district.

Voucher A check or credit granted by a school district or state to parents to pay part or all of the tuition for their children to attend a private school.

FIGURE 6.3 Enrollment in Charter and Traditional Public Schools: 2012–2013



Source: From *The Condition of Education 2015* by Grace Kena, Lauren Musu-Gillette, Jennifer Robinson, Xiaolei Wang, Amy Rathbun, Jijun Zhang, Sidney Wilkinson-Flicker, Amy Barner and Erin Dunlop Velez. Published by US Department of Education, © 2015.

beginning to encourage educators in charter and traditional public schools to share good practices and collaborate on the implementation of the common core and other district initiatives (Pappano, 2014).

VIRTUAL SCHOOLS. The opportunities for students to meet in a classroom online is quickly becoming commonplace. Virtual schools, or cyber schools, and virtual courses exist across the span of schooling from preschool through college and into professional development for teachers and other workers. The number of students enrolled in online courses increased from 45,000 in 2000 to more than 2.2 million in 2014–2015 with 84 percent of them being taken by high school students (Evergreen Education Group, 2015). By the 2012–2013 school year, 310,000 students were enrolled full-time in virtual schools—a 24 percent increase over 2010–2011 (International Association for K–12 Online Learning [iNACOL], 2013).

The most common reason for a student to participate in an online school is that the course is not available in her or his school building (iNACOL, 2013). For example, students in rural areas have taken courses in foreign language and other subjects because teachers for those subjects do not exist in their schools. Advanced placement (AP) courses via technology are also popular. The second most common reason to take an online course is for credit recovery when students have not completed core courses required for graduation (iNACOL, 2013). Online technologies also provide a valuable resource for students who are being home schooled.

Virtual schools are generally tuition-free public charter schools. At least twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia operate statewide full-time online schools (iNACOL, 2013). The oldest and largest state-led school is the Florida Virtual School, which now offers online courses in forty-nine states and sixty-five countries, serving 198,000 students (Florida Virtual School, 2014). A for-profit company, K12 Inc. of Herndon, Virginia, and Connections Academy, which is owned by the Pearson Publishing Company, are the largest for-profit providers of full-time public virtual schools (Evergreen Education Group, 2015). Virtual schools will be recruiting an increasing number of teachers to deliver online instruction and coach students. Is this an option that you are interested in pursuing?



VIDEO ANALYSIS 6.1

Watch this video in which two families and their children talk about why they like virtual learning. Then answer the questions that follow the video in your Pearson eText.

VOUCHERS. The most controversial school choice option is the school voucher. At its simplest, a voucher program issues a check or a credit that can be used by parents to send their child to a

private school. Generally, the argument for vouchers is based on equalizing educational opportunity for students of color and students from low-income families whose children may be attending schools that are not meeting NCLB's **adequate yearly progress (AYP)** requirements. Advocates often argue that vouchers are a market-driven strategy that will force public schools to compete with private schools, leading to improvement in both. Proponents also argue that parents of private schools pay twice—the tuition for the private school plus tax dollars for public schools. Opponents worry that vouchers may encourage the most highly motivated students to abandon public schools (Harvey, 2011/2012). The Center for Education Reform (2015) reports that more than 100,000 students are using school vouchers to attend the private school of their choice.

Wisconsin adopted the first law that allowed low-income families in Milwaukee to move their children from a public to a private school with a voucher of public funds. Ohio adopted a similar voucher plan for Cleveland families in 1996. The most expansive use of vouchers is in the District of Columbia as a result of Congressional enactment of the Opportunity Scholarship Program for 1,700 students in 2004. Most voucher programs are funded with state tax dollars. Legislation that supported early voucher programs limited them to low-income families. State legislation in 2011 expanded the availability of vouchers to middle-class families in Indiana and Wisconsin and to any family in Douglas County, Colorado. Not all voucher programs are publicly funded. Some programs are funded by private foundations and occasionally by individuals. Typically, the amount of a voucher is equivalent to the amount the public school receives for each student.

The debates about vouchers center on the use of public dollars to support private schools. The most serious point of contention is the use of a voucher funded with state education money to pay for a child to attend religious-affiliated schools, which are the main beneficiaries of vouchers. Some opponents have claimed that vouchers raise constitutional questions about the separation of church and state, but the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Cleveland's school voucher program was constitutional under the federal Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

Research on voucher programs has found that students' academic achievement has not improved as a result of those programs. Parents may be more satisfied because school conditions and safety in the private schools they have chosen are better than in the public schools their children would have attended. Graduation rates have been higher for students with a voucher than for their peers who remained in public schools, but researchers have not been able to determine whether this difference is due to the private school or to the motivation of their parents who moved their children to a private school (Center on Education Policy, 2011).

JOURNAL FOR REFLECTION 6.3

- How do you feel about allowing parents to choose a school for their children?
- Of the choices discussed in this section, in which type of school would you prefer to teach? Why?

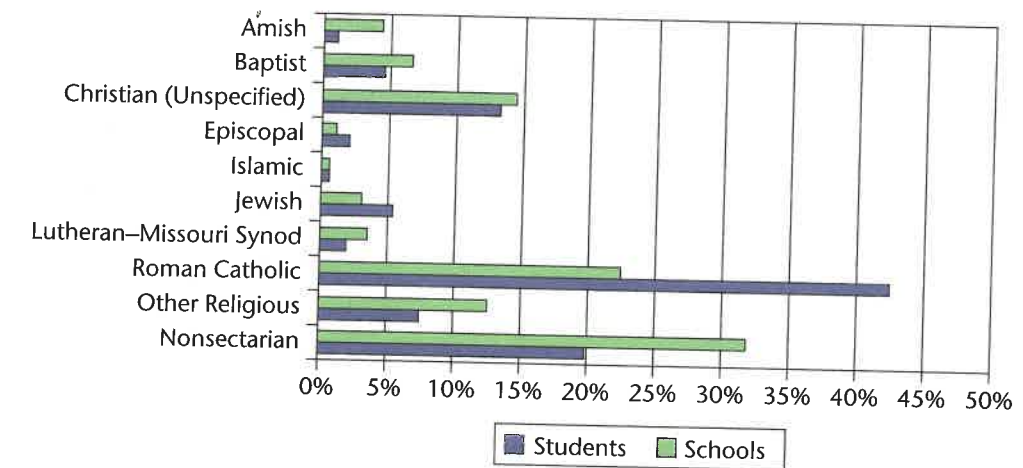
Private Schools

Private schools have been an integral part of our nation's educational resources since colonial times. Because each private school is free to determine and practice its own philosophy of education, the spirit and environment vary from school to school, even though schools may display similar organizational structures and educational programs. They serve students from all racial, religious, economic, and language backgrounds. Some are progressive and innovative; some are conservative and traditional. They are large and small, day and boarding, and single sex and coeducational. They include Montessori, special education, vocational, technical, alternative, and preschools (Broughman, Swaim, & Hryczaniuk, 2013). They range from elite secondary schools (mainly in the Northeast), to alternative schools for high school dropouts, to faith-supported schools, to schools that are operated for profit.

Although enrollment in private schools had grown to 6.3 million in 2001–2002, it had declined to 5.3 million by 2011–2012. The majority of private schools are at the elementary level with only 25 percent at the secondary level (Kena et al., 2015). More students are enrolled in private kindergartens than any other grade level. Private schools are more likely to be located in cities or their suburbs than in rural areas (Broughman, Swaim, & Hryczaniuk, 2013).

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) The annual progress report of how students in a school performed on the state's achievement tests as required by No Child Left Behind and its successor, Every Student Succeeds Act. Schools whose students are not performing at grade level are labeled by the state as "low performing."

FIGURE 6.4 Percent of Private Schools and Private School Students by the Religious Orientation



Source: From *Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2011–12 Private School Universe Survey* by Broughman, S. Pand Swaim, N.L. Published by US Department of Education, © 2013.

PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS. Four in five private school students attend a school supported by a religious group (Kena et al., 2015). The culture of a parochial school may have a positive impact on student achievement. Some researchers have found that students at religious schools—especially African American and Hispanic students—perform better on standardized tests than their public school peers (Broughman, Swaim, & Keaton, 2013). Many religious groups sponsor schools, including the Amish, Muslims, Jews, Quakers, Catholics, and many Protestants as shown in Figure 6.4. Roman Catholic schools enroll more students than any other private schools (Broughman & Swaim, 2013).



Source: Marmaduke St. John/Alamy Stock Photo

SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION. Most single-sex schools and colleges today are private and share the goals of helping their students develop confidence, academic achievement, and leadership skills by building on their unique learning styles and cultural experiences. Schools or academies in some urban areas have been established for young African American men with the goal of improving their opportunities for enrolling in and being successful in college and life. All-girls and all-boys schools are more likely to be at the secondary level than any other level. In fact, 15 percent and 13 percent of all private secondary schools are all boys or all girls, respectively. They are more likely to be located in the Northeast and in cities than in other areas (Broughman et al., 2013).

Parochial schools are parents' most popular choice if they choose to send their children to a private school.

Home Schooling

Home schooling requires no public support; instead, children learn at home with at least one of their parents serving as the teacher. An estimated 1.7 million students were being schooled at home, representing 3.4 percent of the K–12 population in 2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015)—up from 1.7 percent in 1999. Homeschooled students are from diverse groups: 83 percent are white, 5 percent African American, 7 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Asian or Pacific Islander. Although the education program for 84 percent of homeschooled students is provided totally at home, other students attend a school for nine to twenty-five hours per week (Planty et al., 2009).

Homeschooled students sometimes participate in sports and other extracurricular activities at the local public school.

Teaching a homeschooled student requires parents to know the subjects they are teaching, organize each day's instruction, and facilitate their children's learning. One of the advantages, as well as potential weaknesses, is that in most states, the subjects taught are self-determined. This can work in favor of students' interests but may also contribute to gaps in their education. However, parents may use online education programs to supplement their curriculum.

Why do parents choose to homeschool their children? Nine in ten parents indicate that they have made this choice because they have a concern about the school environment of other schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). African American parents who homeschool their children report that the top three reasons they make this choice are to provide religious or moral instruction, provide better academic preparation than traditional schools, and transmit their own values, beliefs, and worldview to their children (Ray, 2015a).

Homeschooling may be successful for many students. The National Home Education Research Institute reports that homeschooled students score 15 to 30 percentile points above their public school peers on standardized academic achievement tests, and homeschooled high school students score above the average on SAT and ACT tests for college admission (Ray, 2015b). However, research studies are not yet able to determine whether the higher achievement of these students is due to their homeschooling; they may have scored at the same level if they had attended public schools.

Innovative Options

You are beginning your teaching career at a very exciting time in which teaching and learning may break out of the classroom mode that has existed in most schools over the past two centuries. These changes may lead to eliminating seat-time requirements in a classroom and to changes in school funding, textbook requirements, and teacher licensure requirements (Quillen, 2011). You are quite likely to teach one or more courses electronically, especially because states are beginning to require **online learning** before graduation. You may be teaching and coaching students whom you seldom or never see; they may live in a different state or possibly a different country. Advocates for these and other innovative options argue that they will serve students more effectively than current teaching strategies and school structures.

ONLINE AND HYBRID LEARNING. Online learning, which occurs over the Internet with synchronous or asynchronous instruction, is becoming common in P-12 settings and continuing through graduate education. Why do students select online courses? High school students pursue online learning to access courses not available in their school or to work at their own pace. Middle schoolers are more likely to choose online courses for extra help (Evergreen Education Group, 2015). Thirty percent of high school students and 19 percent of middle school students were taking online courses in 2010 (Project Tomorrow, 2011). Although 78 percent of these students access online courses from home, most students (92 percent) access their courses at school (iNACOL, 2013). Hybrid or blended programs combine online work with face-to-face instruction by and interactions with teachers in a school setting. The hybrid approach is the most common at this time, but enrollment in full-time virtual schools is growing each year.

PERSONALIZING EDUCATION WITH TECHNOLOGY. Technology is allowing education to be customized for each student, a task that has been very difficult in classrooms with thirty students. In addition, technology is allowing students to work at their own pace at any time of the day. Although teachers may prepare and deliver online lessons and activities, their jobs have changed dramatically from being the authority at the front of the room delivering knowledge to students or managing the recitation of students. The work of students is becoming more hands-on, applying and testing knowledge in real-world situations that have meaning for them. Teachers serve as coaches to help students understand subjects while pushing them to higher levels of learning. One example is the online Khan Academies, which offers lessons at no cost on the core subjects of math, science, and the humanities. Each lesson is approximately ten minutes in length, and the system tracks the lessons with which students have been engaged. Students or adults can choose their own lessons, or teachers can assign lessons to students. The website includes over 3,000 videos, interactive challenges, and assessments. The online system allows

Online learning Education that occurs over the Internet with either synchronous instruction in which the teacher can interact with students in real time or nonsynchronous instruction to which students have access at any time.

teachers to monitor the progress of their students and encourages them to serve as coaches to students as they participate in the academy.



CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 6.3

Complete Check Your Understanding 6.3 to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

GRADE CONFIGURATION IN SCHOOLS

Most school districts have schools designed for different grade levels. However, the design of schools for specific grades evolved over the past century. The first school based on grades was established in 1848 in Boston—the city that was on the leading edge of establishing the roots of our educational system. In the Quincy School, teachers worked in a classroom with fifty-six students who sat at desks that were bolted to the floor. This model was adopted across the country and changed little until progressiveness influenced the structure of the classroom in the twentieth century, turning the bolted desks into tables and movable desks that could be easily moved together for group activities. Over time, class sizes became smaller, averaging 15.6 students by 2007–2008 (Snyder & Dillow, 2015) with student/teacher ratios lower in smaller rural schools and higher in large urban schools.

Not everyone agrees that it is appropriate to divide schools based on age. Some reformers suggest that age distinctions are no longer necessary as students use technology to progress at their own rates. Some students will attend virtual schools. Others will continue to learn in school buildings but may combine online and classroom learning, coming together for small groups or teamwork with each other and teachers as appropriate. At this point, however, your state will expect that you have been prepared to work with students at a specific grade level except for subjects such as physical education, music, art, and sometimes special education that generally require a license to teach in grades K–12.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education was established as a field at the end of the nineteenth century when G. Stanley Hall, a professor at Johns Hopkins University, defined childhood as the years between ages four and eight. This range remains the ages for primary education in today's schools although early childhood education encompasses birth through age eight. However, the focus of early childhood education has changed over time. Between 1930 and the 1950s, the focus was on a behaviorist orientation in which good habits were developed through exercise and drill. With a renewed interest in Piaget and the developmental stages of childhood, the field took on a developmental approach after the 1950s. With the current emphasis on academics and accountability, early childhood education has also moved in that direction with the academic achievement of young children now being assessed. One of the resulting changes of the emphasis on academics is discussed in the "Teaching in Challenging Times" feature. In this section, we introduce some of the most popular early childhood education programs.

HEAD START. The most well-known early childhood program is the federally funded **Head Start program**, which was created as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty in 1964 to help three- to five-year-old children from low-income families be better prepared to enter school. It was created to provide not only educational services but also emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological support for students. Parents are encouraged to be active volunteers in the program. When Head Start was reauthorized in 2007, the curriculum was aligned with states' early learning standards, and the qualifications for Head Start teachers were raised. Children generally attend Head Start programs for half a day, but some schools offer full-day programs. To participate in Head Start, the income of a child's family must be at the federal poverty level or below although schools can allow 10 percent of their Head Start students to be from families with incomes above the poverty level.

MONTESSORI SCHOOLS. Some parents choose to send their children to a Montessori school in which the teacher is the facilitator of learning. The **Montessori model**, which was developed by

Head Start program Federally funded program for three- to five-year-old children from low-income families to provide educational services and emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological support that will prepare them to enter kindergarten.

Montessori model An educational program originally designed for three- to six-year olds that is well organized into subject-based work centers where children interact with the classroom materials. It includes little or no large-group instruction.

TEACHING IN CHALLENGING TIMES

What has Happened to Play?

“Play is disappearing from kindergarten classrooms,” reports Edward Miller of the Alliance for Childhood. Early childhood educators, researchers, and advocates decry the fact that the country’s emphasis on academics and accountability has pushed play out of kindergarten classrooms. Perhaps the pendulum has swung too far to the side of cognitive development, to the demise of other skills that are identified in the *21st Century Learning Knowledge and Skills* framework: collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and physical activity. Some advocates worry that the removal of play is contributing to mental health problems and obesity in young children. The amount of time now available for free play—games, make-believe, and artwork of their choice—has moved to the background, if it exists at all. Because recesses have been eliminated or limited in time in a number of schools, some states are considering legislation requiring recesses in pre- and elementary schools. Is it time

for the pendulum to swing the other way, or can educators and policy makers reach a balance that includes both ends of the continuum to develop a whole, healthy child with the appropriate cognitive knowledge and skills?

WHAT ARE MY CHALLENGES?

1. Why does the elimination of play in early childhood programs concern some researchers and advocates for children? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?
2. What has led to the reduction of playtime in so many schools? How have teachers lost control of their classrooms to outside forces?
3. Who should be involved in the development of a more balanced approach to teaching preschoolers and kindergartners?

Source: Based on Jacobson, L. (2008, December 3). Children’s lack of playtime seen as troubling health, school issue. *Education Week*, 28(14), 1, 14–15.

High Scope model An approach to early childhood education based on the belief that children are active learners and on the child development theories of Jean Piaget.

Montessori classrooms are organized to encourage young children to interact with their environment.

medical doctor Maria Montessori, includes little or no large-group instruction, especially for three- to six-year-olds. The teacher works with one child at a time or with a small group of children. Built into every day at a Montessori school is one uninterrupted three-hour work period during which children are allowed to explore their environment without being required to attend any individual or small-group activities. The Montessori classroom is well organized into subject-based work centers where children interact with the classroom materials. A typical classroom may have thirty to thirty-five students ranging in age from two and a half to six years with one teacher and one nonteaching assistant. The same teacher remains with the same students as they move through this developmental stage. Older children help teach the skills they have learned to the younger children, allowing the teacher to observe and record the skills mastered for the child’s portfolio, which is the only form of assessment used. No grades are given, and no forms of punishment or rewards are used.

HIGH SCOPE MODEL. Another popular approach to early childhood education is the **High Scope model** that is based both on the child development theories of Jean Piaget and on the belief that children are active learners. Students explore materials within structured subject-based centers where items and shelves are clearly labeled with pictures and words so children can experience **environmental print** and categorize materials. High Scope classrooms have a fixed daily schedule and regular classroom routines with the goal of helping children who are economically disadvantaged achieve greater school success and develop social responsibility. The curriculum is designed to provide students with language and literacy, logic and mathematics, music and movement, and creative learning activities to contribute to their cognitive, physical, and affective development. The teacher creates a portfolio with examples of each child’s work and completes



Source: Ulrich Baumgarten/Contributor/Getty Images

developmental checklists to show growth throughout the year. High Scope teachers make regular home visits to help parents learn how to work with their children and to learn more about a student’s home culture and language to ensure that they are reflected and respected in the classroom.

REGGIO EMELIA APPROACH. The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education was created by a teacher, Loris Malaguzzi, after the end of World War II at the Diana School in the city of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy. It was designed to meet the social, emotional, and educational needs of children ranging in age from birth to six years old. Children are subdivided into an infancy group for children up to three years old and a school group for three- to six-year-olds. A group of up to twenty-four children grows together with the same two teachers, an assistant, and the support of parent volunteers for a three-year cycle. Teachers collaborate with each other, parents, children, and community members in meeting the individual needs of each student. The curriculum is project based, allowing teachers to build on known areas of interest, such as dinosaurs, shadows, and community or family-inspired events and interests. While working on their projects, children are encouraged to collaborate with other children to explore information and materials. A sense of community is developed in the school by having some common areas where children from all age groups can mingle and interact. These common areas include a small-group room, a kitchen for children to have snacks, a multiage-appropriate physical development/tumble room, and other small play areas. The Reggio approach ensures that children, their families, their teachers, and the entire community take an active role in the education of each child.

Typical early childhood classrooms in the United States incorporate one or more of these approaches to instruction. A school district may have both the federally funded Head Start and prekindergarten classrooms in schools that use the same packaged curriculum but also include elements of the Montessori, High Scope, and Reggio Emilia approaches. Some school districts offer specialized early childhood programs such as Montessori and language-immersion programs in addition to the regular Head Start or prekindergarten classes.

Elementary Schools

Elementary schools often include the primary grades of PK–3 or K–3 plus the fourth, fifth, and/or sixth grades. In some states and districts, they span grades K–8. State licensure or certification for teachers generally is K–6 or K–8, but the upper limit could be grade 5 if a middle school exists in the school community. If you are planning to teach in an elementary school, you should check the grade-level span for licensure in the state in which you plan to teach to ensure that you take the courses that will lead to the appropriate license.

Most elementary teachers work in self-contained classrooms with twenty to thirty or more students who move to the next grade with a different teacher at the end of a school year. In some schools, teachers team teach with specialists in mathematics, science, reading, language arts, and social studies. Some schools have **resource teachers** who work with classroom teachers to accommodate students with special needs related to reading, mathematics, English, or a disability. Some schools practice **looping** in which teachers remain with the same students for two to three grades.

Elementary schools are more impacted by state testing than other levels because students in grades 3–8 are assessed annually. The elementary grades are also important in enforcing the school values and establishing behaviors for academic learning. Teachers who ensure that their students are learning are critical, especially in the early grades. Research finds that a student who has a good teacher for three to four years in a row will have a much better chance than other students of being academically successful throughout his or her school career (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). The academic foundation established in elementary schools influences a student’s future performance in school. A study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010) found that students who were reading at grade level at the end of the third grade were more likely to finish high school.

Middle Level Education

Schools for early adolescents were first established as junior high schools in Columbus, Ohio, and Berkeley, California, in 1909–1910 to better meet the needs of seventh, eighth, and ninth graders as they transitioned from childhood to adolescence. However, the growth of these schools across the United States was primarily due to the organizational needs of school districts, not the unique

Environmental print The words, signs, and symbols that children see in their daily lives on cereal boxes, television, and street signs as well as at fast-food restaurants and other places they visit.

Resource teachers Specialized teachers who work in a regular classroom with students who have special needs related to reading, mathematics, English, or a disability.

Looping An educational practice in which teachers remain with the same students for two to three grades.

needs of early adolescent students. The large influx of immigrant children and the increasing number of students not passing to the next grade caused elementary schools to become overcrowded. They were often attached to high schools to relieve the overcrowded elementary schools. The number of junior high schools peaked at 7,800 in 1970 (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). They had become miniature high schools that many believed were not effectively serving young adolescents.

Believing that significant physical, emotional, intellectual, and social changes occur between the ages of ten and fifteen, proponents for middle schools called for a more developmentally appropriate school organization. The ideal was to have teachers who were more affectionate and sensitive to young people. General education was promoted over an emphasis on mastery of subject matter. Middle schools began to replace junior high schools, but their growth was again greatly influenced by the realities faced by school districts. As the baby boom generation of the 1950s overcrowded elementary schools, a wing was added to the high school for students in the fifth or sixth to ninth grades.

The middle school generally has at least three but not more than five grades and includes at least grades 6 and 7. As the number of junior high schools declined, the number of middle schools grew to more than 13,000 (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). The most successful middle schools maintain their roots for providing developmentally responsive programs and practices such as collaborative and cooperative learning strategies. Middle schools generally have adopted interdisciplinary team teaching and block scheduling (McEwin & Greene, 2011). However, not everyone agrees that middle schools are necessary. In fact, some critics believe that they overemphasize adolescent development to the detriment of developing academic competence. Some school districts are moving away from stand-alone middle schools and returning to K–8 schools (Meyer, 2011).

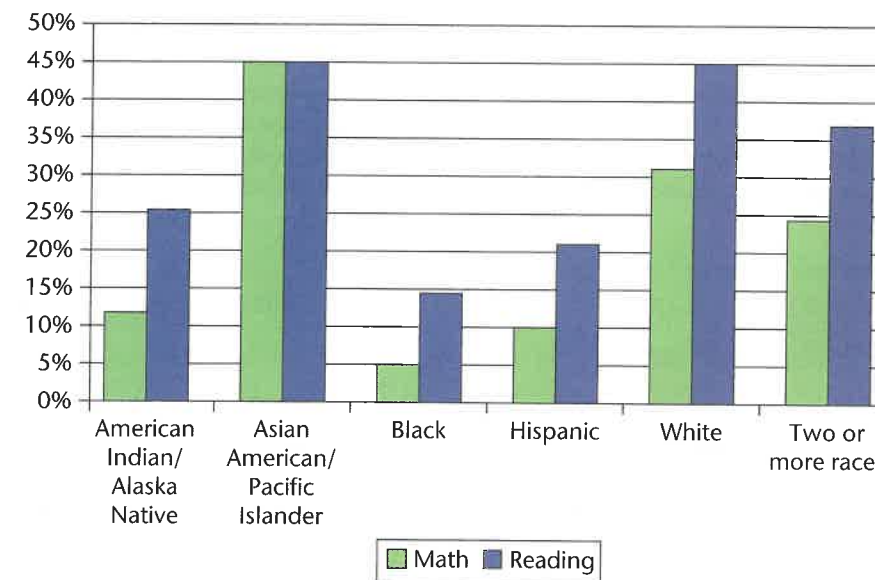
High Schools

After the first high school was established in Boston in 1821, the number of high schools grew slowly until the end of that century. The number expanded during the Great Depression of the 1930s when children were pushed out of the workforce and into the high schools. By fall 2013, nearly 16 million students were enrolled in grades 9–12 (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Almost all students begin high school today with 90 percent finishing high school or a general educational development (GED) certificate by age twenty-nine (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). However, only 81 percent of high school students are completing high school within four years after they started as freshmen with 32 percent of African American, 32 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native, and 24 percent of Hispanic students dropping out of school compared to 15 percent of white students (Kena et al., 2015). Only three in five students with disabilities earned a regular school diploma in 2011 (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). As projections suggest that postsecondary education will be necessary for an increasing number of jobs, the number of students who enter college is also expected to increase over the next seven years. Currently, two in three public high school graduates are entering college immediately after high school (Kena et al., 2015).

TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS. The curriculum of high schools may be similar at the basic level, but only 58 percent of secondary schools offer at least one advanced placement (AP) course (Agus, 2010), and a number of students, especially low-income students, do not have access to higher level English language arts, mathematics, and science courses that may better prepare them for college work.

Today's high schools have been attacked as wastelands for young people. They are condemned for not integrating technology, critical thinking, and problem solving into the curriculum to prepare graduates for a changing workforce in which they will have to adapt to new jobs throughout their careers. Too many graduates are not proficient in mathematics and reading as shown in Figure 6.5. They are also not competitive on international tests with their peers in Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Northern Ireland, Belgium, Finland, and other countries. However, students in more affluent schools score at levels on these test that are competitive with the best students in the world. The problem is that students in schools with high poverty rates are not achieving at the same high level (Berliner, Glass, & Associates, 2014). As a result, governors, businesses, and organizations have established committees to reform schools, especially high schools, with the goal of changing the school culture to improve student achievement and increase graduation rates.

FIGURE 6.5 Twelfth-Grade Students at Proficient Level or Above by Race and Ethnicity



Source: From *Are the Nation's 12th-Graders Making progress in Mathematics and Reading?*. Published by US Department of Education, © 2014.

SMALL HIGH SCHOOLS. Among the proposed high school reforms has been the creation of small high schools to promote stronger relationships among students and teachers with the goals of increasing student engagement and improving student achievement. These small schools are sometimes stand-alone schools and at other times, schools within larger high schools (Bloom & Unterman, 2012). Both the development of small high schools and research about small high schools have been supported by private funding such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Research has found mixed results about the effectiveness of this effort. One of the success stories has been in New York City, where twenty-three large failing high schools were replaced by 216 small high schools. They were able to reduce the risk of dropping out of school for ninth graders and increase graduation rates (Bloom & Unterman, 2012).

HIGH SCHOOL INNOVATIONS. Other innovative projects integrate technology and hands-on learning throughout the high school curriculum. One example is the acclaimed High Tech High (HTH), which in 2015 was operating eleven charter schools (five high schools, four middle schools, and four elementary schools) with diverse student bodies in San Diego, California, communities. They integrate technical and academic education in a hands-on approach to prepare students for both high-tech and liberal arts fields with a goal of increasing the number of low-income students and students of color who study math and engineering. Students also participate in internships in local businesses and agencies. How successful are the High Tech High schools? Over 95 percent of their graduates have been admitted to postsecondary colleges—66 percent of them four-year institutions. They are among the highest achieving schools in California, and 34 percent of their graduates enter math or science fields (High Tech High, 2015). HTH also offers credentialing programs and a Master of Education program for teachers.



Many education reformers are calling for major reforms in high schools to better meet the needs of today's tech-savvy students and prepare them for jobs of the future.

Another innovative approach is the New Tech Network, which was founded in Napa, California, in 1996. Faculty at its 180 schools in twenty-eight states, China, and Australia use a project-based approach to engage students and faculty in real-world problems (New Tech Network, 2015). Students actively engage with technology as a primary tool in the learning process. New Tech was formerly a subsidiary of KnowledgeWorks, an Ohio-based organization that supports personalized learning, early college high schools, and other school innovations. One commonality across High Tech High, New Tech Network, KnowledgeWorks, and similar reform efforts is the involvement of business leaders in the design and support of their schools.



CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 6.4

Complete Check Your Understanding 6.4 to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

THE SENSE OF PLACE: SCHOOL LOCATIONS

The people who share our space and place have a great influence on our culture and lives. We become comfortable with the place where we live, understanding what is expected of us and others. When we move from one area of the country to another, we may suffer some cultural shock and have to learn the culture of the new area. The same is true for students and families as they move from one district to another, especially if they have moved to a new region of the country.

Rural Communities

Fifteen percent of the population lives in rural areas across 72 percent of the nation's land area, continuing a downward trend since 2010 (Kusmin, 2014). By urban and suburban standards, rural families live long distances from one another, and children may travel long distances to school. To the rural family, however, the distances are not great, and a feeling of neighborliness exists. The social structure is less stratified than in more populous geographical areas, and everyone may appear to know everyone else. Values tend to be somewhat conservative as compared to other areas.

Although 33 percent of the nation's schools are located in rural areas and another 14 percent in small towns, only 7 percent of public school students attend these schools (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). These schools have a larger percentage of white and American Indian students than do other areas of the country. The overall poverty rate is slightly higher than in other districts. Rural schools are generally smaller than ones in cities, and the student-to-teacher ratio is lower. Rural students generally perform better on national achievement tests than their town and city peers but

less well than students in most suburban schools (Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

Despite the pivotal role of schools in rural life, these schools face real difficulties. Funding for rural schools, especially those serving low-income families, is often inadequate and inequitable. As a result, these school districts represent a majority of recent constitutional challenges to state funding (Strange, 2011). In some school districts, teacher shortages may result in the staffing of schools by teachers with limited academic background in the subjects they teach. Not all courses (for example, art and foreign languages) can be offered because of the limited number of teachers. Principals may be assigned to several schools, and support services may be limited because of the lack of funds.



Source: Margrit Hirsch/Fotolia

The lived experiences of children in rural communities are foreign to most city and suburban students.

Teachers in rural areas sometimes feel isolated, especially if they are not from the area. As ethnic diversity increases in these areas, teachers will be confronted with cultures and languages to which they may have had little or no exposure.

Rural communities cherish their small schools—where students know each other, their teachers, and most community members. Community members usually fight proposals for consolidating schools because of the long historical traditions associated with their particular schools. In addition, they worry about consolidated schools being so far away that they cannot actively participate in their children's and grandchildren's education. Some students end up riding a bus for one or more hours daily to reach a consolidated school.

Suburban Communities

Approximately half of the U.S. population lives in the suburbs, which have become diverse as families of color have moved into them from the city. The suburbs are becoming even more economically, racially, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse as new immigrants settle in them (Wilson & Svajlenka, 2014). Some communities actively solicit and celebrate diversity. In others, it is discouraged. Breaking past patterns of immigrants settling in their own enclaves in cities, some of today's immigrants from Central America, South America, Asia, and the Middle East are bypassing cities and moving directly into the suburbs or rural areas. After years of population growth in the suburbs, population is declining as retirees and young singles choose urban living over living in the exurbs—the country's outer suburbs.

High-tech companies have found the suburbs ideal for their research and development on software, electronics, and biotechnologies. Entrepreneurs and professionals are attracted to suburban research parks, often moving into elite housing developments near their jobs. However, poverty exists in the suburbs as well as in cities and rural areas. More than half of families in poverty now live in the suburbs (Kneebone & Berube, 2013).

Families may move from cities to the suburbs to ensure that their children receive a better education. Funding for schools has traditionally been higher in the suburbs than other areas. Wealthy suburbs boast beautiful school buildings, sometimes on sprawling campuses, with the latest in technology, qualified teachers, advanced placement courses, gifted and talented programs, and numerous extracurricular activities. However, not all suburban schools are of this high quality. Students who are English-language learners and who are from low-income families or who are from backgrounds other than European are more likely to attend the older schools in the region.

Although the overall racial and ethnic diversity of suburban school districts has increased, the diversity of individual schools is limited. The typical white suburban student will attend a school with a majority of white students. In the schools that most African American and Hispanic suburban students attend, students of color will be in the majority. African American and Hispanic students are more likely to attend high-poverty schools than other students—a pattern that applies across all school districts no matter where they are located (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Although the number of African American students attending suburban schools has increased, it remains disproportionately lower than other groups (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012).

Enrollments in suburban schools are, on the average, higher than schools in other areas. The student-to-teacher ratio is also slightly higher in suburban schools at 16.6 students per teacher compared to 15.5 in rural schools and 16.3 in urban schools. Suburban students outperform their rural and urban counterparts on achievement tests, and more suburban students than students from other areas attend college (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Safety is generally less of a concern for students, parents, and teachers.



VIDEO NOTE 6.3

Watch this video of students in two schools in Lexington County, South Carolina. In what ways are the students in the small rural high school in Swansea experiencing education differently than students in River Bluff?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwEkJr0v1pk>

Urban Communities

Urban areas are usually rich in educational and entertainment resources such as libraries, museums, theaters, professional sports teams, colleges, and universities. People from different economic and cultural backgrounds intermingle in many parts of a city. An expensive restaurant can be on one block with a soup kitchen on the next block. Homeless people and families are more visible in urban areas as affordable housing becomes scarcer and the number of public housing units does not meet the needs of the population. Cities provide creative energy for many of their inhabitants, but they are oppressive and dangerous for others. Many families live in safe environments with good schools, parks, and recreational facilities. Others live in economically depressed environments that contribute to high incidences of asthma and other diseases. Some sections of the city are scarred by gunshots and graffiti. Ambulances, police raids, and funerals for young people in these parts of the city are common occurrences.

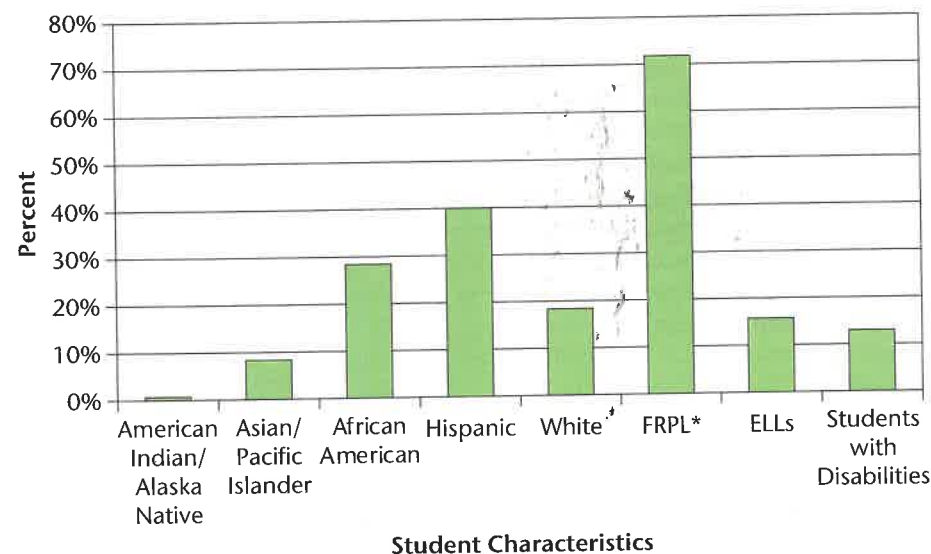
The largest one hundred public school districts represented less than 1 percent of all school districts but were responsible for 22 percent of all public school students (Sable, Plotts, & Mitchell, 2010). Students in these largest districts are very diverse, as shown in Figure 6.6.

Schools across a city look different and serve their students differently. Upper middle-class parents are more able to donate funds to assist their schools when teachers of art and music have been cut from the district's budget. When their children are not learning at the expected level, they can hire tutors. Although many low-income parents are actively engaged in their children's education, the proportion of upper middle-class parents involved is higher. They talk with teachers; they ensure that their children have the best teachers; they encourage their children to study and participate in extracurricular activities; and they monitor their children's performance. Low-income parents lack the same **cultural capital**. Their income does not permit them to support school activities in the same way.

A school may serve as a refuge for some urban students. However, some students have less than desirable classrooms and attend schools that do not provide maximum conditions for learning. Teachers in urban schools generally have less experience than suburban teachers and are not as likely to have majored in the subjects they are teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2010). When students are in overcrowded classrooms with teachers who do not know the content well and who have trouble managing the class, students may become less engaged in their academic work and drop out of school at higher rates than their peers in suburban and rural schools. Urban

Cultural capital
The knowledge and ideas required to maintain or gain status and power in society.

FIGURE 6.6 Student Diversity in the Largest City School Districts



FRPL* = Free or reduced price lunch for students from low-income families

schools can be difficult for both students and teachers as described in the "Perspectives on Diversity" feature.

Urban schools can be highly centralized, authoritative, and bureaucratic. However, communities are electing their own school boards in a number of urban school districts. Those with reform-minded leaders are reducing the bureaucracy, becoming more decentralized, and allowing parents more choice in their schools. In a few cities such as New York City and Washington, D.C., mayors have taken over the management of their schools with the goal of reforming schools and improving student learning.

Magnet schools are popular in urban areas (Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, 2013). So are charter schools; 45 percent of the country's charter schools are in cities (Snyder & Dillow, 2015) with the largest percentage of charter school students in New Orleans (90 percent), Detroit (55 percent), Flint (44 percent), District of Columbia (44 percent), and Cleveland (39 percent) (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2015). Although research suggests that small class size is critical to improving learning in areas with students who are economically disadvantaged (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009), the average student-to-teacher ratio in city schools is higher than in rural schools (Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

PERSPECTIVES on DIVERSITY

Make Me Learn

Mr. Huang starts his Algebra I class even though only half of the students have arrived. When Jamal walks in ten minutes late, he sits at the back of the room and begins talking about last night's basketball game.

"Jamal, where's your homework?" says Mr. Huang.

"Ain't got it," he says as he turns back to his friends.

"How do you think you can pass this class without turning in your homework?" Mr. Huang returns to the problem on the blackboard. "Who can solve this equation?" he asks the few students who are listening.

Around the room, students are tuned into their iPods or talking to their neighbors. In the back of the room, they are arguing about whether LeBron James or Kobe Bryant is the best NBA player. Only two students hand in their homework, and most will be lucky to get a D at the end of the grading period.

Jamal walks over to the wall to check his average. It is under thirty. On his way back to his desk, he tells a friend, "No way he's gone to fail me. He knows I'll come after him. He's not keeping me from graduating."

Mr. Huang walks over to Jamal's desk to remind him that his mother asked Mr. Huang to tutor him after school. "Why haven't you

met me after school? There's no way you can pass this class without some extra help. Let's start by putting away that iPod."

"No way, man. You can't tell me what to do. When I feel like it, I will meet you for tutoring. I don't have the feeling yet."

Another student in the back of the room jumps up, saying, "I'm tired of this. Anybody going with me," and starts out of the classroom.

"I'm with you," Jamal retorts as he leaves his seat and departs the room.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSPECTIVE?

1. Very little learning appears to be happening in this classroom. Why is Mr. Huang having such a difficult time handling the students in his classroom?
2. What strategies would you use to engage these eleventh graders in Algebra I?
3. The National Governors Association, the Gates Foundation, and others are calling for a major reform of high schools. What changes need to occur in urban schools like this one to develop an academic environment that promotes learning?

Source: Based on Parker, L.O. (2007, November 11). "Will Jonathan Graduate?" *The Washington Post* 130(341), pp. A1, A16-A18.



CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 6.5

Complete Check Your Understanding 6.5 to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

SUMMARY

PURPOSES OF SCHOOLS

- Schools serve many purposes, including a student's development of knowledge and skills for academic proficiency, workforce involvement, citizenship, social development, and cultural transmission.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SCHOOLS

- Culture determines the way we behave and think within society.
- The values, traditions, and beliefs of the dominant culture are reflected in the policies and institutions of society, including schools.
- Families have their own unique cultural backgrounds based on their ethnicity, native language, and religion that may differ from the dominant culture.
- Schools have their own cultures with histories and traditions that affect the way students and teachers behave.

SCHOOL CHOICES

- Parents in many communities have the option to place their children in public or private schools or to homeschool them if they have the necessary resources.

- Even within the public schools, parents have a growing number of options such as magnet, charter, and virtual schools.
- A few school districts allow qualified families to receive a voucher to enroll their children in private schools at public expense.

GRADE CONFIGURATION IN SCHOOLS

- Schools have been divided into four levels based on the age of students—early childhood education, elementary, middle level, and high school—to meet the needs of children and youth.

THE SENSE OF PLACE: SCHOOL LOCATIONS

- The place in which we live affects our cultural identity and life experiences.
- Poverty is greater in rural and urban areas but is growing in suburban areas.
- Schools in suburban areas—except those closest to the city have greater financial support, and students perform at higher levels on achievement tests.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the school curricula for early childhood education through high school have become standards based, and the performance of students is assessed regularly. What is the relationship of standardized testing to the different roles of schools discussed in this chapter?
2. Students and families bring their cultures into the classroom. Teachers also bring to school their cultures, which may be different than that of their students. What problems can arise if teachers establish their own culture as the norm to be followed in the classroom? What cultural norms should guide a classroom in which students are culturally diverse?
3. Charter school advocates often indicate that state and district regulations are obstacles to good schools that help students learn. What regulations are they talking about?

How might those regulations prevent a school from being as effective as it could be?

4. States match the licenses that teachers receive to a specific subject or age level of students, which in turn matches the school levels discussed in this chapter. Why are teachers not generally granted a single license to teach students across the P–12 grades? What teachers can receive a license that crosses all of the grade levels?
5. The income status of students' families in central cities and rural areas are somewhat equal, but their schools are different in size, diversity, and culture. What obstacles to a good education may students face in these two different settings? What are the positive elements of their school locations that could contribute to a more effective education for students in those two areas?

SCHOOL-BASED OBSERVATIONS

1. Select a charter school in your area to visit. During your observations, identify characteristics of the school culture, students, teachers, and instruction that are similar to and different from the neighborhood schools that you have attended or observed. Record your observations in your journal or portfolio.
2. Visit two schools located in different geographic communities (i.e., rural, suburban, or urban) and systematically

record characteristics such as the ethnic and racial composition of the students, the income level of families, the size of the student population and teaching force, the student-to-teacher ratios, the general school climate, and other observable characteristics. What appears to be working well at the schools? What appears to be problematic at the schools?

PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

1. To develop an understanding of school culture and its role in the establishment of effective schools, record the characteristics of schools by using one of the following two approaches:
 - a. When you visit a school, record the condition of the building, the characteristics of documents on the walls of the building, the type of instruction observed in classrooms, the reflection of students' cultures in the school, the mission of the school, and generally how students and teachers feel about the school. Also record the diversity of the school population, which is usually available on the school's website, and how students are performing on state-required standardized tests, which is also available on the website. As you look at your observations and data, write a paper, or newspaper article, or blog post about how the school culture supports (or does not support) student learning.
 - b. Review three of the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon schools (see the USDE website) or the effective schools identified by the Education Trust (see the Education Trust website). Write a report, newspaper article, or a blog post about the school cultures of some of the schools that appear to be serving their students well, at least in terms of improving their academic achievement.
2. Some critics of charter schools worry that the establishment of charter schools will harm public schools. Write a paper or blog post about the strengths and disadvantages of charter schools. Include in your paper/blog an analysis of the contributions charter schools could make to public schools and how you think their establishment is supporting or harming public schools.

WEB SOLUTIONS

To learn more about the schools and culture of the innovative schools in High Tech High and New Tech Network, visit their schools online. You will be able to tour schools, listen to students describe their experiences, and consider whether

these are the types of schools in which you would like to teach.

Check out digital learning in schools at the website of the Alliance for Excellent Education.