

Critical Issues and Solutions in Urban Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this research work is to select few of the most pressing issues in the field of urban education and come up with meaningful solutions for them. The three issues addressed are: policy, curriculum, and stakeholders in urban education. Each issue plays a critical role in urban education. Policies give guidance to the teaching-learning process. Curriculum sets the goals and expectations for the teaching-learning process. Stakeholders are the implementers and proponents of the teaching-learning process. This paper analyzes the effectiveness of each issue and lays out ways they can be synergized to better serve urban students.

Keywords: policy, curriculum, stakeholders, low-performance, urban education

Marriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, eleventh edition, 2003, defines *critical* as the point at which quality suffers a definite change, and an approach at the state of a crisis.

Therefore, critical issues in urban education are issues that affect quality education in urban America. According to Wilson, 2012, most of the residents in inner-cities or urban areas are minorities and immigrants. He argues that 40 percent or more of the nation's poor live in inner cities.

Issues

The three most critical issues I believe that are plaguing urban education are: policy, curriculum, and stakeholders. According to dictionary.net, policy is a collection of rules and/ or laws that govern the operation of education systems. According to the Glossary of Education Reform, curriculum refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes learning standards or objectives they are expected to meet, and the units and lessons that teachers teach.

The Glossary of Education Reform also refers to stakeholders as students, administrators, teachers, staff members, parents, families, community members and leaders, local business leaders and elected officials, advocacy groups, and organizations representing superintendents, principals, and school boards. Payne, 2013 describes an urban school that lacks the administrative structure and resources to effectuate policies as a "demoralized school." Payne, 2013 argues that a demoralized school is one that lacks trust, organization, support among teachers and staffers, respect, social relationship, curriculum structure, and clear goals. Hudley, 2013 argues that due to the fact that the education standards in urban schools are lower, and there

is a lack of cutting-edge resources and quality staffing, urban schools will always perform poorly than schools in suburban districts.

Milner & Lomotey, 2014 suggest that the best curriculum that can make a difference in the performance of students in urban schools, especially, African American students is one that is tailored to their needs. The National Center for Learning Disability, an affiliate of RTI Action Network also supports Milner's position that curriculum reform is pivotal in urban education.

Stakeholders play a part in teaching and learning. Stakeholders can be entities, such as corporations and business executives who serve on school or district boards and are the powerhouses behind most of the policies that are implemented in schools. Some stakeholders may play a proactive role in seeking the interests of students while others may seek their own interests. According to Ravitch, 1998, these are board bureaucrats who hold schools accountable for performance, and encourage a well-planned experimentation with charter and contract schools, and the voucher option.

Solutions

In an article produced by Cornell University, 1992, certain recommendations were made as the means by which policy change could impact urban education. According to the article, success in policy alternatives goes beyond education. It should address health and poverty issues, support adequate resources, focus on students, promote the value of education, reaffirm programs that work, reallocate resources to students in need, and restructure the school work place. Hudley, 2013, notes that Dahl & Lochner, 2005, suggest that the government should supplement the income of low-income parents with cash incentives through a tax code. They

researched and found that it correlates with the achievement of urban students. Hudley, 1991 & Klein, 2009 suggests that urban schools should be staffed with effective teachers.

According to Milner & Lomotey, 2014, a curriculum that is culturally responsive can make a difference in the teaching-learning process in urban education. They believe that culturally responsive teaching can address the complexities of ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity in education. They affirm that it improves the achievement of urban students, gives practical meaning to equalizing educational opportunities, and liberates and empowers students.

The National Education Association (NEA) lays out a comprehensive plan for stakeholders and how they can help in closing the achievement gap of urban students. The article notes that teachers should use effective instructional strategies, maintain high standards for all students with rigor, understand and capitalize on student's diverse cultures, etc. The article recommends that teachers' union leaders should collaborate with district leaders for funding to initiate programs to meet the needs of students, and identify strategies to improve achievement. Education support leaders should serve as a link to families and the community. District and school leaders should create a professional learning community with programs to close the achievement gap, Families should provide a home environment that supports learning, and communicate with teachers and school personnel. National, state, and local leaders should enact policies that support educators' efforts. Business and community leaders should maintain active partnerships with schools.

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