



# BEST PRACTICES

for Effective Urban Education



ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL



**IN MOST URBAN SCHOOLS MORE  
THAN HALF THE STUDENTS ARE POOR.**

## Introduction

*As America enters the twenty-first century full of hope and promise, too many of our neediest students are being left behind. We have a genuine national crisis. More and more, we are divided into two nations—one that reads, and one that doesn't; one that dreams, and one that doesn't.* These are the words of the president of the United States concerning the educational plight of mostly urban, minority, and poor children:

- There are nearly 600 urban school districts in this nation. (An *urban* district is defined as one in which 75 percent or more of the households served are in the central city of a metropolitan area.)
- Over 12 million children attend schools in urban districts.
- Some 43 percent of minority children attend urban schools. (Most urban schools are predominantly—often completely—minority.)
- In most urban schools more than half the students are poor, qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches.
- Two-thirds or more of urban-school children fail to reach even the “basic” level on national tests. Urban students perform far worse, on average, than children who live outside central cities on virtually every measure of academic performance. The longer they stay in school, the wider that gap grows.<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, too many of these children are being written off as uneducable, undereducable, learning disabled, and having special needs, along with a host of other labels used to explain why they perform so poorly in comparison with other children. When offering a reason, the explanation is often in reference to factors over which the children have no control. For example, children cannot control where they are born, the communities in which they grow up, the marital status of their parents, or the economic conditions under which they must live. Yet, all of these are used to explain (and sometimes justify) the low academic performance and adverse social behavior of these children.

What is most alarming are the stakes involved. Most urban minority fourth graders cannot read at the basic level. That is, these 10-year-olds cannot read at a level that will guarantee them any kind of real academic

1. Education Week on the Web. 1998. Quality counts 98: The urban challenge. Retrieved April 10, 2002, from <http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc98/intros/in-n.htm> (no longer available).

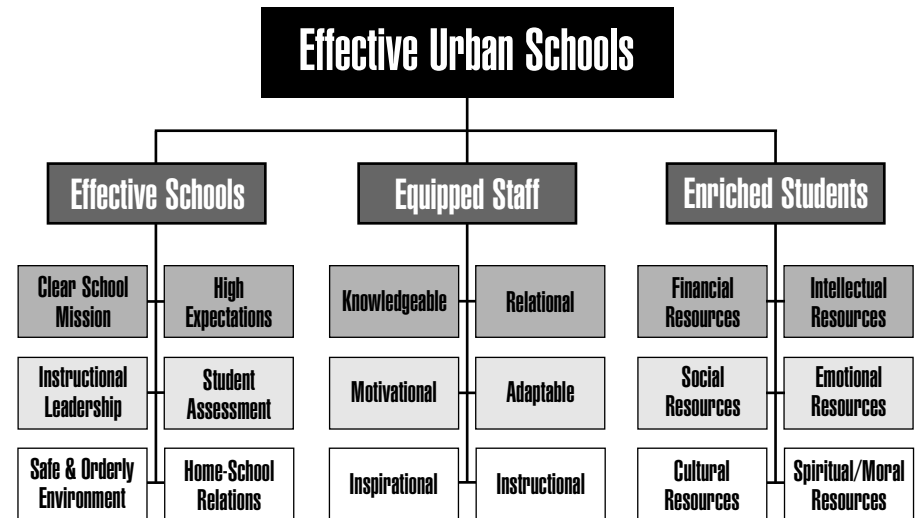


**OVER 12 MILLION CHILDREN ATTEND URBAN SCHOOLS.**

future. With little hope of an academic future, the chances of a successful social future are equally dim. Mix poverty into the equation, and the numbers reach calamitous proportions. The vast majority of poor urban children read below the basic level. Given the fact that their current level of education offers few positive options in their future endeavors, the chances are great that negative options will prevail. Perhaps this prevalence of negative options explains the reason why most prisoners in state correctional institutions do not have a high school diploma.

The truth, however, is that there is nothing fundamentally or inherently wrong with these children. They simply suffer from the failure or inability of their support systems to provide them with what they need to function effectively and successfully in society. Included in those systems is the one that exists to educate them. The critical need is an educational system that equips them to read and inspires them to dream.

An educational package that effectively educates urban children to achieve must contain three essential elements. These elements are like the three legs of a stool—all three are necessary for the stool to function properly. The three ingredients that make up an effective urban education package pertain to the school, the staff, and the student. The chart below outlines the elements of each component.





## Effective Schools

The **school** must be effective in that it achieves high and equitable levels of student learning. It is expected that all children regardless of their race, gender, place of residence, and socioeconomic status learn the core knowledge, concepts, and skills necessary for being productive and resourceful. Overall, the instructional program must be developed around the content of the subject matter, the context the student already knows, and the method through which the student prefers to learn. It must take into consideration what the student should know, how the student will be assessed, and how the student learns. Schools that successfully educate urban, minority, and poor children usually have the characteristics listed below.

*The questions (in italics) will assist you in determining the degree to which these correlates of effective schools are true of your school.*

### CLEAR SCHOOL MISSION

In an effective school, there is a clearly articulated school mission through which the staff members share an understanding of and commitment to instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. The staff members accept responsibility for students' learning of the school's essential curricular goals.

*State your school's mission and the level of staff connection to the school's mission:*

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**EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS PRODUCE EFFECTIVE STUDENTS.**

## HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR SUCCESS

In an effective school, there is a climate of expectation in which the staff members believe and demonstrate that all students can attain mastery of the essential content and school skills, and the staff members also believe that they have the capability to help all students achieve that mastery.

*Does your school believe that all children can learn?* Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

*List two school policies that demonstrate how staff expectations are implemented to ensure that all students can attain mastery of the essential content and school skills.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

In an effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and persistently communicates that mission to the staff, parents, and students. The principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program.

*Who is the instructional leader of your school?*

\_\_\_\_\_

*What percentage of this person's time is used to provide  
(a) instructional guidance, (b) oversight, (c) observation?*

(a) \_\_\_\_\_ % (b) \_\_\_\_\_ % (c) \_\_\_\_\_ %

## STUDENT ASSESSMENT

In an effective school, student academic progress is measured regularly and on an ongoing basis. A variety of assessment procedures are used. The results of the assessments are used to improve individual student performance, the instructional program, and teaching strategies.

*What kinds of formal and informal assessments does your school use?*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*How often are your students assessed?*

\_\_\_\_\_

*How are the assessment results used to improve student performance?*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## SAFE AND ORDERLY ENVIRONMENT

In an effective school, students learn in an orderly, clean, purposeful, and professional atmosphere that is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning.

*How would a visitor describe the orderliness of your school and the students' behavior?*

\_\_\_\_ Very Orderly                      \_\_\_\_ Somewhat Orderly

\_\_\_\_ Somewhat Disorderly            \_\_\_\_ Disorderly

## HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS

In an effective school, parents understand and support the school's basic mission and are given the opportunity to play an important role in helping the school achieve that mission.

*On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the level of parental involvement and support for the school's mission from low support and involvement to high support and involvement. 1 2 3 4 5*

*List two activities that your school practices to engage the parents and promote parental involvement and support of the school's mission.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



AN **EQUIPPED** STAFF IS A STAFF READY TO EDUCATE.

## Equipped Staff

The teacher is the key to the learning process. Therefore, the **staff** must be both professionally and personally trained, equipped, and able to work with the urban children who attend their schools. Like the schools, the teachers must possess six characteristics to educate urban children effectively.

*As an educator, check the appropriate box to indicate whether you do each of the listed teaching components regularly, somewhat, or never.*

Instructional	Regularly	Somewhat	Never
Writing is a reflection of students' diction, grammar, and general ability to articulate thoughts. Teachers in all disciplines should emphasize writing as a powerful tool for learning and an effective tool for demonstrating what has been learned.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should have clear expectations for learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers must provide each child with equitable access to the necessary learning resources and to adequate learning opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should spend at least 90 minutes daily in reading and math.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should be given homework assignments that reinforce and extend academic concepts learned during the school day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers should prioritize vocabulary building and the development of effective language skills for mastery of standard English.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The curriculum must agree with and support the beliefs, philosophy, mission, goals, and objectives of the school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The curriculum must meet the academic levels of the students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The teachers' guide/edition should provide clear, easy-to-follow instructions that enable even novice teachers to carry out their task with a high level of success and effectiveness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Knowledgeable</b>	<b>Regularly</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Never</b>
Teachers should clearly understand that it is their role and responsibility to provide effective and empowering instruction for each child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should be evaluated at the end of each unit in order to maintain current and up-to-date progress of student learning and to identify challenges of taking exams. Teachers should identify test-taking strategies for student mastery of test-taking skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers should be familiar with the different learning styles of students and use diverse methods and strategies to ensure the success of these diverse learners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers must facilitate the maximum growth of each learner by making informed academic adaptations that match and build on the learner's prior knowledge, experiences, skills, and beliefs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers must ensure that learning outcomes are important, meaningful, relevant, and useful to each child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers should be sensitive to and aware of cultural differences and the impact they have on learning and classroom behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All textbooks must be examined to ensure that materials are culturally sensitive. Do pictures and authors reflect diverse cultures and races?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers should employ only those teaching strategies that have a proven record of success for yielding high academic outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Motivational</b>	<b>Regularly</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Never</b>
The purpose of learning should be relevant to the students' needs. The teacher must create and stimulate student interest in the subject content.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers should challenge every student to learn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers should promote individual empowerment, self-efficacy, positive self-regard, and a belief in societal reform.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers should establish a classroom climate that supports and expects overall student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Adaptable</b>	<b>Regularly</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Never</b>
Teachers should be familiar with the different learning styles of students and use diverse methods and strategies to ensure the success of these diverse learners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers must facilitate the maximum growth of each learner by making informed academic adaptations that match and build on the learner's prior knowledge, experiences, skills, and beliefs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers must ensure that learning outcomes are important, meaningful, relevant, and useful to each student.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Relational</b>	<b>Regularly</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Never</b>
Teacher collaboration and teamwork are essential for building a strong learning community. These can be accomplished through ways such as sharing teaching strategies, teaching in teams, observing other teachers' lessons, and solving problems collaboratively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers must nurture learning-support communities for each child (such as families, peers, homework hotlines, and community centers).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers should build positive and supportive school and classroom learning environments that are grounded in mutual and genuine respect for cultural diversity. Buildings and classroom decorum must reflect a diverse society.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers must value diversity as well as human commonalities; teachers should be sensitive to and aware of cultural differences and the impact they have on learning and classroom behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers should work diligently to obtain and maintain parental support and trust.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Inspirational</b>	<b>Regularly</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Never</b>
Teachers must promote a classroom climate that is built on Christ-centered principles, social justice, democracy, and equity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers must build the self-esteem of students by routinely using positive reinforcement to encourage academic achievement, build Christian character, and foster desired student behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers must hold each child to a high academic and personal standard of excellence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM EQUIPS THEM TO  
READ AND INSPIRES THEM TO DREAM.**

## Enriched Students

The great challenge facing the schools and educators of urban children is how to educate these students to function on the same level as their more advantaged peers in nonurban schools. Addressing this challenge starts with an understanding of the children with whom we are working. Urban children possess relatively few of the resources necessary for being academically productive and successful. These resources come in many forms. Besides financial resources, there are other resources that play a vital role in the social and academic well-being of children. Underresourced children will have to be resourced in their areas of need. The reason that attempts at educating these children fail by and large is that there is a failure to recognize and address all the resource areas. Compensation must be made to fill in the needs gaps.

**Financial Resources:** *those material goods that are developed by acquisition and that can be used productively*

**Cultural Resources:** *the knowledge of the beliefs, customs, practices, and rules of a social group—all of which can be used productively*

**Intellectual Resources:** *those human capacities (mental and physical) that are developed by education and that can be used productively*

**Social Resources:** *those relationships and contacts that are either acquired or developed naturally and that can be used productively*

**Emotional Resources:** *feelings of sufficiency and determination, both of which can be used productively*

**Spiritual Resources:** *those belief structures that provide the bases for purpose, morals, values, discipline, and self-worth and that can be used productively*

The following chart demonstrates the difference that the level of resources can make in a science fair project:



Resource-Rich Child	Resources	Resource-Poor Child
Has parents with the ability to purchase materials, and has access to technology and reference materials for both content and presentation	<b>Financial Resources</b>	Has parents who have low purchasing ability or none at all, and has limited access to technology and reference materials (with the quality of the project reflecting this lack)
Has at least one college-educated parent with knowledge, experience, and/or low learning curve in constructing science projects	<b>Intellectual Resources</b>	Has parents with an education at high school level or lower and with limited knowledge and experience in science content and in constructing science projects
Can access a network of individuals (family, friends, parents' coworkers) who can provide technical support and assistance	<b>Social Resources</b>	Has an extremely limited network of relationships that can be called upon for assistance
Has a strong educational foundation that has helped the child to develop adequate discipline and practices to allocate the necessary time and effort for successful completion of the project	<b>Cultural Resources</b>	Has an educational foundation with low emphasis on the study discipline necessary for project initiation, completion, and success
Is provided positive encouragement, feedback, and expectancy communications that serve as continuing stimuli toward success	<b>Emotional Resources</b>	Is often corrected and given negative communications that lead to discouragement, poor self-perception of abilities, and underperformance

As a result, in many instances the child's grade is as much a reflection of the resources available to the child as it is of the child's intellectual ability. The effective school, then, must compensate to the degree possible for the resource-deficient child as outlined below:

Children with a deficiency of **financial resources** must be given a quality education without tuition as a barrier. The school must set its tuition policy according to the family's ability to pay. While every family should pay something so that there is a physical investment in the child's education, the education should not be priced beyond the family's affordability range.

Children with a deficiency of **intellectual resources** must be given an education that

1. Assumes that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the child and that the child has a God-given ability to learn
2. Assesses where the child is academically so as to take the guesswork out of teaching the child
3. Assigns instructional materials that best fit the child's learning style and that take into consideration the child's home environment (e.g., if the child has limited intellectual resources at home, the school should have a policy of not sending home any homework that requires a parent's help)
4. Assists the students in the learning process

Children with a deficiency of **social resources** must be given an education that

1. Is taught by teachers who are culturally, racially, and socially sensitive to them
2. Recognizes the children's limited social network and seeks to compensate for it, usually with the help of volunteers
3. Exposes them to the broader community outside their urban districts

Children with a deficiency of **cultural resources** must be given an education that includes training in and development of cultural skills. The skill training falls into three basic categories:

1. Interacting skills, such as
  - greeting others
  - talking with others
  - getting attention
  - making requests

2. Giving skills, such as
  - giving an apology
  - giving criticism
  - giving a compliment
3. Accepting skills, such as
  - accepting instructions
  - accepting criticism
  - accepting disagreement

(adapted from *Teaching Social Skills to Youth*, Boys Town, NE: Boys Town Press)

Children with a deficiency of **emotional resources** must be given an education that

1. Is more relational than institutional
2. Works with the parents so that the home and school form a partnership in the child's development
3. Provides teachers who are aware of the child's situation and are able to encourage and speak positive expectancy communications to the child

Children with a deficiency of **spiritual resources** must be given an education that

1. Is biblically integrated
2. Seeks to disciple the child in a relationship with Christ
3. Speaks to the child's heart as well as to the child's head

*Does your school have a procedure for identifying your students' resource deficiencies?*

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_\_\_ No    \_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat



Urban School Services  
 PO Box 65130  
 Colorado Springs, CO 80962-5130  
 719.528.6906 • urbanservices@acsi.org

# FACTS

In an effort to assist in the implementation of best practices, ACSI's Department of Urban School Services exists to help Christian schools and educators effectively educate urban students. The department provides services and resources in five areas that are represented by the acronym FACTS:

## FUND-RAISING AND DEVELOPMENT

Many urban families cannot afford the cost of a tuition-based school. Urban School Services provides consultation for schools in developing a contributions-based program in order to make their services affordable to economically disadvantaged families.

## ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT

Urban schools and educators target and serve children who are academically at risk. In many instances, these children have been undereducated. Urban School Services offers professional assistance designed to assist in developing an educational program that effectively serves underresourced children.

## CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The curriculum is related to academic enrichment in that it is the tool that delivers the educational package. Urban School Services provides assistance to urban schools and educators in designing and developing a curriculum for urban students that is both academically excellent and socially and culturally relevant for the urban child.

## TEACHER TRAINING

Increasingly, teachers in urban settings are culturally, socially, and racially removed from the students sitting in their classrooms. In order to be effective, teachers must know and relate to their students. Urban School Services provides consultation in diversity assessment and training for urban schools and educators.

## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

ACSI offers nationally recognized accreditation programs for preschools, elementary schools, and secondary schools. These programs enable schools to pursue and maintain academic and spiritual excellence. ACSI also provides professional credentials for teachers and administrators.





# BEST PRACTICES

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Urban School Services  
PO Box 65130  
Colorado Springs, CO 80962-5130  
719.528.6906 • [urbanservices@acsi.org](mailto:urbanservices@acsi.org)