Schools are receiving students of immigrant origin in unprecedented numbers. Using an ecological framework, the authors reviewed the community, school, familial, and individual challenges that immigrant adolescent students encounter. They examined cognitive, relational, and behavioral dimensions of student engagement as well as culturally sensitive strategies for parental involvement. Varying academic trajectories were identified revealing that although some students performed at high or improving levels over time, others showed diminishing performance. The implications for school counselors’ roles in school-family-community collaboration and intervention and practice are discussed.

The unprecedented number of immigrants residing in the United States today has radically shifted the composition of our country and, by extension, our classrooms. Recent census data reveal that 13% of the U.S. population is foreign born, representing a 20% increase since 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b, 2007). The immigrant youth population also has increased rapidly: Today, 1 out of 5 children in the United States is the child of an immigrant (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b, 2007). The immigrant youth population has increased rapidly: Today, 1 out of 5 children in the United States is the child of an immigrant (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), and by the year 2040, more than 1 out of 3 children are expected to be children of immigrants (Hernández, Denton, & Macartney, 2007). Immigrant students undergo a myriad of unique migration-related stresses while adapting to a new schooling environment (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001), placing them at particular educational risk. The stakes of school failure are greater today than ever before (21st Century Workforce Commission, 2000), and thus, it is paramount that we deepen our understanding of the processes that contribute to trajectories of academic success. As the landscape of our schools continues to change, the instrumental role of school counselors in facilitating healthy and successful transitions for the immigrant population has become ever more pronounced.
with the exciting but challenging task of determining practice and policy decisions appropriate for each student.

Particularly in the current segmented labor market, where opportunities are limited for the undereducated (Gans, 1992), academic outcomes are important indicators of future social and economic mobility for immigrant youth. However, the middle and high schools that serve these students are often ill equipped to meet their needs, leaving them “overlooked and underserved” (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2001, p. 1). Furthermore, nearly half of immigrant students arrive in the United States sometime during the course of their secondary education, a period of time already characterized by a “downward educational spiral” for many adolescents (Eccles et al., 1993, p. 90), as many traditional secondary schools fail to meet students’ developmental needs. These effects may be especially pronounced for newly arrived immigrant youth, as they often experience dissonance between their home and school environments (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). In a sense, those with the most at stake in their schooling are the least prepared to achieve in the academic arena.

Certainly, not all immigrant youth succumb to these risk factors by disengaging or failing in school. Academic trajectories are extremely varied: Some students are able to maintain their initial optimism over the years, and others demonstrate varying levels of achievement over time, often being able to avoid downward assimilation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). It is likely that over time, an immigrant student’s academic adjustment is determined by a host of individual, family, and school factors. Scholars have demonstrated the importance of examining multiple contextual factors in association with the different trajectories of integration available to today’s immigrants (Rumbaut, 1999), and in the following section, we propose an ecological framework to examine challenges inherent in the various nested contexts in which immigrant youth develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). We then examine the school engagement patterns for this population, and we describe findings from a recent longitudinal investigation of immigrant adolescents. We conclude with implications for school counselors.

CHALLENGES OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS: AN ECOCLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Immigrant youth do not develop in a vacuum, but rather through a multiplicity of overlapping ecological contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The various characteristics of the individual, his or her family, school, and community are all linked to a diversity of academic trajectories.

Individual Challenges

Inevitably, immigration is as stressful as it is transformative. Immigrant youth find themselves stripped of many key relationships—close friends, extended family, and familiar community members—and find themselves in a new social context where customs, schools, and (often) the language are different in both striking and subtle ways. Unsurprisingly, immigrants often feel a keen sense of loss and disorientation (Suárez-Orozco, 2000), and the process has a lasting impact on their development. Immigrant youth are subject to acculturative stress, as they are charged with learning a new set of cultural rules and interpersonal expectations (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997).

In school, many immigrant youth must acquire new approaches to schooling that may contradict what they have been accustomed to in their home countries. Students may not be aware of American teachers’ expectations of frequent and active participation in class, may be inexperienced in “learning” that deviates from rote memorization, or may misinterpret the role or authority of the instructor (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). For example, student quietness is often a sign of deference in other cultures, but it may be interpreted as ignorance or lack of motivation in the United States (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Different countries adhere to different expectations regarding the purpose of schooling or appropriate student behavior, and like all other cultural practices, immigrant students must become acquainted with the educational scripts of the new country.

Finally, in addition to the standard curriculum, many immigrant students are confronted with the vital task of acquiring a new language. Although it has been well established that 4 to 7 years of optimal academic instruction are generally required for students to develop academic second-language skills comparative to native English speakers (Collier, 1992, 1995; Cummins, 1991; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000), schooling cannot, of course, be put on hold until such competence is achieved. English mastery is therefore a very urgent undertaking for many immigrant youth. Meanwhile, English-language learners (ELLs) are less equipped to participate in mainstream classrooms: Without the same cultural and verbal input enjoyed by their native-born middle-class peers, they often read more slowly, feel that teachers and other students speak too quickly to follow, and miss the import of jokes and double entendres. These students are also likely to score lower on “objective” assessments because of their academic English skills, and language issues also may stand as a hurdle to their engagement in a
Family Context Challenges

Immigration tends to have a destabilizing effect on the family (Sluzki, 1979). Children are confronted with the simultaneous tasks of adapting to a new land while still fulfilling traditionally expected familial roles. While a “generation gap” between parent and child expectations is common to all adolescents, this is especially poignant for immigrant families, as the contrast between the “new” and “old” cultures is highlighted in much sharper relief. Although many parents are eager to see their children acculturated to the mainstream American culture, they may be unaware or disapprove of certain aspects of the new culture if they conflict with traditional values. In addition, long work hours and other parental obligations reduce the amount of time that family members are able to spend together (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Parents react to these stresses in a multiplicity of ways, often simultaneously. They may grow anxious or depressed by their physical and psychological unavailability (Ahearn & Athey, 1991). Feeling threatened by the encroachment of new cultural values and behaviors among their children, they may attempt to “tighten the reins” as well as they can, sometimes becoming severe disciplinarians (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Recognizing that their children are able to acculturate or learn English more quickly than themselves, they may relinquish their authority in certain areas as well, prematurely forcing their children into the often stressful roles of linguistic translators and cultural brokers (Orellana-Faulstich, 2009; Umaña-Taylor, 2003). Such reversals of culturally scripted familial roles have profound effects on the family unit as a whole. While at times empowering, family cohesion can be threatened; children may feel depressed and alienated, sometimes seeking refuge in alternative family structures, such as gangs (Vigil, 2002), impeding their adjustment, well-being, and learning in schools.

The family structure may be compromised over the course of the migratory journey as well. During immigration, parents are frequently separated from their children as they search for adequate housing in the host country (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). When one or both parents are first to migrate, children are often left in the care of extended family members and are consequently subject to at least two separations: first from their parents, and then from their caretakers to whom they may have become attached. Complications may arise at both junctures, as well as when the children are ultimately reunited with their parents (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). Each of these three points of potential trauma—separation from parents, separation from extended-family caretakers, and reunification with parents—can give rise to a host of emotional problems and social challenges that may affect academic performance (Arnold, 1991; Burke, 1980; Rutter, 1971; Sciarra, 1999; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Wilkes, 1992).

Finally, alternative orientations to education affect not only the students, but their families as well, requiring many immigrant families to readjust their expectations. For example, in many Latin American and Asian cultures, respect for the teachers is considered paramount and is best demonstrated through entrusting the teacher with all issues pertaining to education, a factor that often results in parents appearing uninvolved in their children’s education (Valdés, 1998). In U.S. schools, however, such an attitude can be negatively perceived as detachment, negligence, or lack of commitment to education. While certainly most immigrant parents would like their children to do well in school—indeed, for many parents, the motivation to immigrate is prompted specifically by a desire to provide a better education for their children (Hagelskamp, Suárez-Orozco, & Hughes, in press; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008)—immigrant parents may espouse varying beliefs regarding what constitutes a “successful” student. For example, traditional values regarding gender-appropriate educational attainment or vocational pursuits may be at odds with modern American mores.

Macro-Context (School, Community, and National) Challenges

Communities with large numbers of new immigrants are typically served by underresourced schools, often racially and ethnically segregated institutions (Orfield & Lee, 2006), which provide limited opportunities for their students (Kozol, 1991). These schools are likely to have a disproportionately high number of minority students, and are likely to be linguistically isolated, which puts students at further academic risk (Orfield & Lee). The multiple dimensions of segregation (class, racial/ethnic, and linguistic) are associated with a variety of negative school characteristics, including limited school district resources (Orfield & Lee), low teacher expectations (Weinstein, 2002), poor achievement test outcomes (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), high dropout rates (Orfield & Lee), and limited information about access to college (Gándara & Contreras; Orfield & Lee). Such school contexts also are associated with negative school climates (Noguera, 2003) and increased school violence (Goldstein & Conoley, 1997), which undermine students’ capacities to concentrate, their sense of security, and their ability to learn (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).
While immigrants reside in virtually every type of social and geographical setting, from the inner city to rural outskirts, the majority of individuals who immigrated to the United States after 1965 are concentrated in cities with large ethnic populations (Bartel, 1989). While living in close proximity to fellow countrymen may ease the emotional burdens of immigration, students’ educational attainment may not necessarily benefit from an ethnically segregated community. Academic success for working-class and minority youths is dependent on the supportive relationships of those who have “the capacity and commitment to transmit … institutional resources and opportunities such as information about school programs, academic tutoring and mentoring, college admission, and assistance with career decision making” (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995, p. 117). Immigrants are disproportionately likely to live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), and while some are able to derive this kind of social capital from their ethnic enclaves (e.g., Louie, 2004), others suffer from minimal institutional relationships in their community (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Even if individuals or institutions capable of providing this crucial social capital exist in the students’ communities, they may be inaccessible to immigrant families for a variety of reasons. Language proficiency is an obvious hurdle for many immigrants: Fifty-two percent of foreign-born residents over the age of 5 have limited proficiency in English (as indicated by self-reports of speaking “not at all,” “not well,” or merely “well,” as opposed to “very well”; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), potentially hindering their access to vital knowledge and support. Immigrants also may be expected to suffer the effects of racism and discrimination, both real and perceived, within their communities and in society at large, reducing the approachability of social supports, if not cutting them off outright. Though students are often documented, this problem is undoubtedly exacerbated for undocumented parents, who are either legally or de facto barred from receiving many services (Fix & Zimmermann, 2001). The Department of Homeland Security estimates that approximately 39% of foreign-born individuals in the United States are undocumented immigrants (Hoefer, Rytina, & Baker, 2009).

Finally, the effects of circumstances in the country of origin, such as political upheaval, ethnic or religious persecution, and traumas arising from war, may be expected to afflict the individual regardless of circumstances in the new country (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Refugee or asylum-seeking students have often been witness or victim to harrowing experiences of torture, terrorism, or the death of loved ones (Lustig et al., 2004). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an extreme consequence of such contexts; the compromising of students’ ability to trust school officials or other government agencies is equally understandable.

**SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT: EDUCATIONAL ADAPTATION AND SUCCESS**

School engagement, “the degree to which students are ‘connected’ to what is going on in their classes,” has been shown to contribute to academic performance (Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996, p. 131). Engagement is a broad construct that has been used in the social sciences in a variety of ways (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Here, we present a tripartite conceptualization of engagement, conveying three interrelated dimensions of student engagement (cognitive, relational, and behavioral), which together play a central role in how well students perform in school (Fredricks et al.; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). In line with our ecological perspective of development across contexts, we also extend our reasoning on engagement to the families of students and, in particular, students’ parents.

**Cognitive engagement** is the degree to which the students are engrossed and intellectually involved in what they are learning (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). It is the antithesis of “being bored” in school, and data show that academic self-efficacy and attitudes toward school are instrumental in fostering this sort of academic involvement (Schunk, 1991).

**Relational engagement** is the extent to which students feel connected to their teachers, peers, and others in their schools (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). The ability for students to adapt to the new schooling environment is heavily dependent on these relationships (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1994): They provide students with positive feedback and a sense of belonging in addition to emotional and tangible support (Wills, 1985). Relationships foster academic engagement and achievement, and from them students learn socially competent classroom behavior. Immigrant students who are able to form meaningful, positive relationships at school are most likely to successfully adapt to their new educational environment.

**Behavioral engagement** is the component of academic engagement that specifically reflects students’ participation and efforts to perform academic tasks (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Behavioral engagement is evidenced by traits such as regular attendance, appropriate classroom behavior, satisfactory class participation, and turning in assignments on time. Perhaps because students are assessed in schools by this behavioral manifestation of engagement, behavioral engagement is highly correlated...
with other measures of student success, and it is the most represented form of engagement in the existing literature (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Family engagement, and in particular parental engagement, is equally crucial for the educational success of many students. Parents’ involvement in their children’s schooling, both at home (e.g., homework assistance) and at the child’s school (e.g., parent-teacher conference attendance), has been linked, among other indicators, with higher student test scores, lower dropout rates, and fewer disciplinary infractions (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)—in essence, a form of behavioral engagement. However, due to differential cultural scripts about schooling, many parents are unaware of the expectations in the new land to monitor their children’s education (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Similarly, they may be unaware of the propriety of interfacing with school personnel directly (Suárez-Orozco et al.). Regrettably, demographic or socioeconomic factors, such as language barriers, long working hours, or lack of child care or transportation, prohibit even willing parents from being as engaged with their children’s schooling as they might be otherwise (Suárez-Orozco et al.). In addition, many immigrant parents may fear or experience the unfamiliar school environment as unwelcoming, threatening, or even disrespectful to them (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005).

ACADEMIC TRAJECTORIES: FINDINGS FROM THE LONGITUDINAL IMMIGRATION STUDENT ADAPTATION STUDY

The Longitudinal Immigration Student Adaptation (LISA) study (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008) was a 5-year longitudinal study that used interdisciplinary and comparative approaches (employing ethnographic, psychological, and educational methodologies) to document the initial adjustment patterns and unique experiences of more than 400 recently arrived immigrant adolescents from Central America, China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico in the San Francisco and Boston metropolitan areas. A variety of individual-, family-, and school-level constructs were hypothesized to impact academic performance over time.

The study addressed the following research questions: (a) What were the relationships between immigrant resources including economic, cultural, and social capital and schooling? (See Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008.) (b) How did the school context shape academic engagement and outcomes? (See Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008.) (c) How did separations, reunifications, and the social process of immigration affect the family system, including culturally constructed role expecta-

tions, patterns of familial cohesion, authority and discipline, and linguistic and literacy patterns? (See Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002.) (d) How did social relations (including extended family, peers, teachers, mentors, community and religious leaders) influence academic engagement and achievement? (See Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009.) (e) What were the relationships between gender and school processes and outcomes? (See Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004.) A range of strategies was deployed to elicit data on demographic characteristics, immigration histories, changing family systems, networks of social relations and supports, school and neighborhood contexts, gendered dynamics, and patterns of academic engagement and disengagement over time. (For a thorough report of LISA procedures and analyses, the interested reader is referred to Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010, or Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008.)

Selected Findings from the LISA Study

Consistent with previous research (Alspaugh, 1998; Eccles et al., 1993), the LISA participants as a whole demonstrated a significant decline in academic performance over time. However, Nagin cluster analyses revealed five distinct trajectories of academic performance (measured by GPA) for the newcomer students. (See Figure 1.)

A quarter of the sample (25%) started at a 3.0 GPA and experienced a slow decline of about half a grade point over the course of the 5 years (Slow Decliners); another quarter (28%) of students started at approximately the same performance level but demonstrated a much sharper decline of over 1.25 grade points (Precipitous Decliners). An additional 14% of the sample started much lower than any other group (2.0 GPA) and over the course of the study declined an additional half grade (Low Achievers). However, two groups of students defied this pattern of decline: A quarter of the students (24%) performed at a consistently high level, maintaining a 3.5 GPA over 5 years (High Achievers); and the remaining minority (11%) began the study only slightly outperforming the Low Achievers, but managed to improve their GPAs by nearly a whole point by the end of the study (Improvers).

Multinomial logistic regression analyses were conducted to reveal how certain individual-, family-, and school-level variables contributed to the likelihood of belonging to the various academic trajectories (Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, in press). Some characteristics associated with less than optimal trajectories (i.e., non-High Achievers) included students’ reported psychological symptoms such as depression and anxiety; limited English proficiency; decreased behavioral engagement; family separations during migration (both the presence and length of

In school, many immigrant youth must acquire new approaches to schooling that may contradict what they have been accustomed to in their home countries.
separations were significant), and students’ perceptions of school violence, verifying that factors across various ecological contexts collectively impact the students’ academic performance.

A multiple-case study approach served to supplement quantitative findings with vivid depictions of the participants’ lived experiences (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Of particular interest to the school counselor in this data is the fact that networks of relationships emerged as a tremendous asset to immigrant youth as they adapted to a new country and a new school. Students relied on relationships with peers and adults both in and out of school for emotional, practical, and academic support. In light of this, the prevalence of family separations observed in this sample is especially troubling. Fully 85% of the participants reported an extended (between 6 months and 10 years) separation from one or both parents over the course of their immigration. As would be expected, children who had experienced family separation were more likely to report depressive symptoms than those who had not (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002).

Cognitive engagement and relational engagement were significant predictors of behavioral engagement, which in turn emerged as a very strong predictor of achievement. Relational engagement also bolstered cognitive engagement. Students with better relationships in schools reported finding their academic work more interesting and engaging. Consistently high achievers were significantly more behaviorally engaged in school than were the low or precipitously declining performers. The findings from this study are clearly demonstrative of an educational imperative for schools: To improve immigrant students’ academic trajectories, we must first improve their engagement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING PRACTICE: A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL

Whether school counselors will be successful in facilitating the healthy adaptation of immigrant students will depend largely on their ability to leverage their skills in assessment, intervention, and consultation in order to enhance the functioning of the whole child (academic, socio-emotional, and mental health), as well as on their ability to adapt traditional models of mental health to the needs of today’s school system. Rather than focusing solely on remediating problem behavior, we endorse a school counseling model that simultaneously seeks to prevent negative outcomes and promote positive youth development. Because multiple ecological contexts have shown to affect students’ academic success and psychological well-being, a comprehensive program will address student needs from a variety of domains. In addition,

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**Figure 1. GPA performance trajectories.** (This figure first appeared in Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008.)
we recommend the formation of partnerships among schools, families, and the community to collaboratively promote the development of immigrant students.

Prevention and Intervention
Both the academic achievement and the positive adjustment of students can be facilitated by a taking a three-tiered approach to prevention derived from public health (Walker & Shinn, 2002). In this model, the primary level of prevention addresses the needs of all the immigrant students within the school counselor’s purview. The goals are to identify the challenges and risks facing students in their functioning, to support students’ developmental needs, and to address them through system-wide prevention programs, preventing the development of problem behavior. Secondary prevention and tertiary prevention target at-risk or high-risk students for whom the goal is to decrease the likelihood of problem behavior or extinguish its emergence (Evans, Van Velsor, & Schumacher, 2002). In the context of immigrant children, the notion of problem behaviors might encompass issues of academic underachievement or maladjustment, including academic disengagement and involvement with deviant peer groups. Because prevention requires a comprehensive initial assessment of risk at all levels of the school in order to identify the students in need, learning as much as possible about the cultures of origin of immigrant students is of fundamental importance to school counselors as they anticipate possible acculturation difficulties or the likelihood of alienation between parents and the school.

At the Individual Level
Because the needs and challenges facing each immigrant student will vary widely according to the circumstances surrounding his or her immigration, school counselors are urged to conduct thorough immigration histories in assessing the present and potential needs of each student. In order to provide appropriate individual planning, it behooves school counselors to spend some time with each immigrant student to learn of any immigration- and family-associated risks as well as students’ previous schooling and linguistic backgrounds.

Identification of trauma. School counselors should consider whether the student has been exposed to any potentially traumatizing situations in his or her home country (e.g., war) or during the migration journey itself (e.g., perilous border crossings, family separations). Because both the presence and length of family separations were shown to negatively affect students’ academic performance, school counselors should be especially attentive to the circumstances leading up to, and the nature of, such separations. They also should ask about several key relationships surrounding the separation: that between the child and parents before and after the separation, between the child and any caretakers in the parents’ absence, and between the caretaker and parents themselves, each of which potentially alters the way the separation and subsequent adjustment are experienced (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). While not permanently scarring for most families and children, it will for a time be a painful and complicated process. The availability of mental health services (both within the school and the community at large) should be discussed with all students for whom such traumas are identified (secondary prevention), and explicitly encouraged for those already demonstrating psychological distress, such as PTSD or depression (tertiary prevention), both of which are associated with negative school outcomes.

Social support networks. Given that inadequate social support networks are a major challenge for many immigrant youth, and that relational school engagement bolstered cognitive engagement, both of which strongly predicted behavioral engagement (and in turn, academic achievement), school counselors also should gather information regarding the quality of students’ network of relationships within the school. They should seek to understand such details as the size of the student’s network, whether it extends beyond peers of the student’s own ethnic origins, and whether the student has access to peers who share the same language of origin who can assist him or her with academic English and with homework assignments. Other relevant questions include the following: What is the student’s level of exposure to native English speakers? What is the nature of the student’s relationships with his or her teachers (e.g., are these relationships supportive, authoritative, mentor-mentee)? What is the likelihood that the student is exposed to toxic events such as discrimination based on ethnic origin? Particular risk factors for which professionals should be vigilant include social isolation and withdrawal, exposure to deviant peer groups, and lack of supportive relationships with adults in the school.

Adjusting to a new form of schooling. School counselors should be sensitive to the fact that many immigrant students will never before have experienced a school context quite like the one in which they currently find themselves. They may not, for example, be familiar with a class rotation system dependent on a series of bells to inform them when to change classes and instructors (Olsen & Jaramillo, 2000). As a form of primary prevention, school counselors should provide all immigrant students, regardless of circumstance, with a general primer on the operations and expectations of their new school. In addition, all immigrant students should be noti-
At the Family Level

Parent outreach. Parent involvement in children’s schooling has shown profound effects on students’ engagement, performance, and adaptation to school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Prior research also has shown that parents can act as buffers against the challenges associated with migration and help to ward off the onset of psychiatric symptoms (Alegría, Sribney, Woo, Torres, & Guarnaccia, 2007; Mendoza, Javier, & Burgos, 2007; Qin, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Therefore, reaching out and involving immigrant families in school affairs is critical in fostering children’s adjustment. In order to tailor outreach efforts to various immigrant groups, schools must be outwardly welcoming of parental involvement (Carreón et al., 2005; Mitchell & Bryan, 2007). To this end, communication from the school will ideally be initiated by positive circumstances, rather than waiting for a crisis to compel the school to call home (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Parent-focused services, such as English-language instruction or parent support groups, also may be offered on campus to emphasize that parents’ presence is valued and appropriate. School counselors also may enlist the help of parent volunteers who have been in the country for some time and possess first-hand knowledge of the challenges of migration (Mitchell & Bryan).

With planning and preparation, culturally sensitive forms of communication can be developed, relevant topics identified and discussed, and potential barriers anticipated. With the Latino population, for example, school-wide efforts should be made to reach out to parents by using Spanish-speaking community liaisons. A personal invitation or home visit is often much more effective than posting a Spanish-language flyer. Because many immigrant families face obstacles that already limit their availability to their children (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001), school counselors must be as accommodating of family schedules and locations as possible (Sosa, 1997). Such practices can serve to welcome, engage, and incorporate immigrant families into the fabric of the schools.

Collaborating with parents. As valuable as parents’ presence at their children’s school may be (Carreón et al., 2005), the impact of parent engagement at home is equally if not more significant (Suárez-Orozco & Willms, 1996). Not only do parents spend more time with their children than school counselors would ever be able to do, they also are often quite effective in providing the sustained support necessary for positive educational and psychosocial outcomes when students are not in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Because schools and families would ideally be working in concert to promote these goals, it is frequently helpful for school counselors to meet individually with immigrant parents to discuss their children’s needs and to collaboratively devise solutions for both home and school. School counselors should make clear their intentions to be on the same team as parents in supporting the student’s academic success. In addition to informing parents of the school’s expectations for their children, school counselors should encourage parental engagement at home, clearly explicating the steps that they should take, such as expressing high expectations and encouraging students to try their hardest on assignments (Henderson & Mapp).

In addition, school counselors should encourage an open dialogue with parents and listen attentively to any concerns they may have. From parents, school counselors may better understand the contextual sources of students’ behavior, enabling them to more effectively assist both the family and the child. They may identify unanticipated sources of risk and implement secondary or tertiary treatment options. In working with immigrant parents, two effective techniques from a systems-based approach are normalizing, helping parents to see how their struggles and their children’s are normative, and reframing, restating a negative situation by reconsidering it in a positive light (Mullis & Edwards, 2001). It may be helpful, for example, for parents to be aware of the prevalence of family separations during immigration, and how many other families, confronted with the same issues, have been able to overcome them. School counselors also may recognize unhealthy parent-child interaction patterns, such as when a parent has trouble reasserting control over his or her child, a frequent complication of reunification after separation (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002), especially when the parent feels guilty for having separated from the child in the first place (Arnold, 1991; Burke, 1980). In such cases, a school counselor may help the family set up appropriate boundaries for authority and leadership within the family unit and refer individual members or the family as a whole to outside counseling services.

Connecting families to other resources. If the school counselor identifies a need affecting the student’s family, he or she may refer them to services offered either at the school or in the community at large. For example, the school counselor might connect students and parents to local resources such as...
English as a Second Language classes, parenting classes, legal assistance, and access to bilingual/bicultural leaders. These resources may help families deal with tensions and disagreements, many of which can arise as a result from the adjustments to migration (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco, & Rhodes, 2003), while potentially relieving students of some of their cultural brokering responsibilities (Park-Taylor, Walsh, & Ventura, 2007).

At the School Level
**Social dynamics of students.** School counselors working in diverse and heterogeneous schools need to prevent or address multiple social obstacles to optimal functioning. These include the formation of cliques, power dynamics between minorities and ethnic groups, student conflicts, and peer racism and discrimination. Observation of unstructured time (lunch periods, etc.), reports of critical incidents, and consultations with teachers can provide valuable data with which to assess the quality of the school environment. Student perceptions of school violence were shown to negatively affect the academic performance of immigrant students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008), but the benefits of a safe, tolerant, and positive school climate would be experienced by all members of the school. School counselors thus should endeavor to build “immigrant-affirming school communities” through primary prevention strategies such as school-wide culture appreciation weeks and classroom-based cross-cultural simulation exercises to encourage intercultural relationships and promote multicultural understandings (Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007, p. 73).

The secondary prevention strategy of implementing a mentoring system through the school by assigning volunteer teachers/mentors to immigrant students also can help to foster a supportive community and leverage the role of supportive relationships as a facilitator of adjustment and student engagement (Green, Rhodes, Hirsch, Suárez-Orozco, & Canic, 2008; Harker, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). When they act as mentors and alternative authority figures, teachers can mitigate the frequent unavailability of immigrant parents (Roffman et al., 2003).

**Collaborating with teachers.** School counselors should work equally collaboratively with students’ teachers and any other school personnel relevant to their academic success. Ideally, these systems of school professionals and the family would all work cooperatively on a team committed to helping the student succeed in the school (White & Mullis, 1998). For instance, the school counselor might facilitate a meeting that brings together the multiple stakeholders responsible for the student’s positive adjustment (the school counselor, teachers, school psychologist, family members, mentors or coaches, etc.) so that they can collectively discuss goals and decide how best the child can be served. As the school counselor helps school professionals understand the various challenges unique to the immigrant population, the multiple contexts in which the student is differentially situated can work in partnership to ensure the child’s academic success (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Goh et al., 2007; White & Mullis).

School counselors’ work with teachers need not be only student specific. Weinstein (2002) has demonstrated how teachers’ expectations shape the educational experience and outcomes of their students. Unfortunately, cultural research on the relationship between values and achievement patterns has led to the myth among some teachers that the importance placed on the family in some cultures may deter students from their academic work and hamper academic achievement (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Moreover, when asked about working with diverse groups of students, teachers often express concerns about the inadequacy of teacher preparation programs pertaining to multicultural education, the challenges of working with ELLs, and the problems that arise from the lack of communication with parents and families (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). In many schools, it will be worthwhile for the school counselor to implement staff development workshops to help teachers and other personnel become better acquainted with the needs of the immigrant population. Examples of group intervention in this regard include presentations about students’ cultures of origins and discussion about the issues of alignment between cultures of origin and host culture, discussions of how family separations or other stresses of migration can affect students, and workshops to raise awareness about teacher attitudes and expectations and about the impact of various instructional practices.

At the Community Level
**Linking with community agencies.** Earlier, we suggested that school counselors refer families to outside agencies for additional support. In this final ecological context, we urge school counselors to go one step further and seek to actively develop partnerships with local community agencies. The goals of students cannot be divorced from the goals of the community, and schools and community agencies will both be more successful if their efforts are joined. For example, schools may partner with local mental health agencies, universities, youth development programs, or faith-based organizations to jointly and collaboratively work to provide much-needed services for students and their families.

To facilitate the healthy adaptation of immigrant students and promote multicultural understandings (Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007, p. 73).
students, one strategy that schools might take would be to partner with free after-school programming and mentoring services. After-school centers can be a source of community cohesion and supervision, which can serve to inoculate youth against toxic elements in their new settings (DeVos, 1977; Perkins & Borden, 2003; Roffman et al., 2003). Such programs serve a variety of functions beyond the immediate and obvious utility of helping to level the playing field of access to opportunities on the homework front for immigrant-origin students. Mentoring relationships often evolve organically in after-school and community organizations and make a tremendous difference in adolescents’ lives (Rhodes, 2002; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). For youth in stressed families with limited social resources, mentors can serve to support healthier family and peer relationships by alleviating pressure on the family (Roffman et al.).

Bicultural mentor relationships may be particularly useful in serving newly arrived immigrant youth, as they may serve as a bridge between the old and new cultures; an acculturated mentor can act as a fount of information about the new cultural rules of engagement. Mentoring relationships also can serve to heal ruptures in relationships resulting from long separations and complicated reunifications (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Furthermore, mentoring relationships have been shown to reduce substance abuse, aggressive behavior, and incidences of delinquency (Rhodes, 2002). In addition, college-educated mentors can help their protégés perform better in school not only by helping them with homework, but also by providing them with informed advice about how to access the road to college—a path nearly impenetrable to many newcomer immigrant students (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

The families of immigrant students also may benefit from partnerships. For example, community centers may help to organize newcomer family information nights to discuss critical issues about education, offer means of navigating the school system, and maintain communication with teachers and school staff. In such sessions, school counselors are uniquely positioned to help students and their families by sharing their knowledge about resources in the community and by making referrals (e.g., to outreach organizations, after-school options, and support networks such as religious organizations and mental health clinics), thus helping immigrant families in rebuilding social networks and accessing opportunities in the community.

Conclusion

In closing, school counselors can play a pivotal role in helping immigrant-origin students meet their academic potential. While these students face many challenges, they also bring the tremendous resilience, hope, and motivation of immigrant optimism (Kao & Tienda, 1995). With a clear understanding of the issues that immigrant students confront and a willingness to work in collaboration with families and communities, schools can do much better than they traditionally have to harness these students’ boundless potential.

References


