The Socio-ecology of Academic Achievement Across Racial Boundaries:
The Role of Context in Understanding Disparate Outcomes
By Ali Campbell and Professor Gia Barboza

**Background/Objectives**
- A tremendous body of research explores the individual level and school-related factors that predict poor school attachment, engagement, and outcomes, especially in urban contexts;
- Relatively little is known about the broader role of community in facilitating or impeding academic outcomes;
- We propose to understand school attachment, engagement and outcomes from a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the multiple ecological contexts of youth development;
- A socio-ecological perspective is useful to identify the correlates and consequences of low academic attainment in distressed communities;
- Specifically, we situate individual level characteristics in a larger framework to emphasize a pathways approach to academic and career success.
- To understand the systemic interactions between institutions such as family, school, community and political/policy environments
- To advocate for a proactive policy agenda that emphasizes partnerships between schools and community-based organizations

**Theoretical Approach**
- Disengagement is a process; dropping out of school is a discrete event
- Analyzing disparities in academic attainment across communities to understand both in-school and out-of-school determinants of school performance;
  - Factors inside school that impact school performance
    - Class/School size,
    - Student-teacher ratio,
    - Teacher-student relationships.
  - Factors outside school that impact school performance
    - Family stress, i.e. housing instability, family structure;
    - Community-based violence, victimization and trauma;
    - Community norms.

**Research Approach**
- A mixed methods approach
- Collected information on the process of disengagement along three dimensions
  - Access;
  - Retention; and
  - Completions.
- Created a model of school success to be replicated

**Results**
- Cultivate embedded partnerships to establish the necessary horizontal and vertical pathways;
- Provide the horizontal support or human “glue” that ensures the seamless transitioning of youth through the horizontal and vertical pathways; and
- Support youth in overcoming the institutional barriers by a) implementing a positive youth development approach that challenges youth to see their own unique strengths and abilities and b) leveraging systems change.

**Policy Implications**
- A child’s interaction with the education system cannot be divorced from his or her socio-ecology.
- Development of a Pathways Approach to Academic and Career Success:
  - Vertical Pathways: transitional services and partnerships to facilitate transitions through school and work;
  - Horizontal Pathways: Preventative or Intervention-Based Services to help youth deal with personal issues that affect in-school performance;
- Educators and school administrators need to be well versed in the variety of issues youth face outside of school that affect their performance in school
- But partnerships are critical to address these issues, schools cannot do it alone.

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**Abstract**
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