with a largely low-income ethnic minority student body (65 percent African American) reorganized into “career academies”—learning communities within the school, each offering a different career-related curriculum (for example, one focusing on health, medicine, and life sciences, another on computer technology). The vocationally relevant academic program combined with more caring teacher–student relationships helped create a school climate in which peers valued school engagement, collaborated on projects, and were motivated to do well academically (Conchas, 2006). High school graduation and college enrollment rates rose from a small minority to over 90 percent. Finally, teenagers’ use of text messaging, e-mail, and social media sites to remain continuously in touch with peers—even during class and while working on homework—is an aspect of contemporary peer-group life that poses risks to achievement. See the Social Issues: Education box above to find out about the impact of “media multitasking” on learning.

School Characteristics. Adolescents need school environments that are responsive to their expanding powers of reasoning and their emotional and social needs. Without appropriate learning experiences, their cognitive potential is unlikely to be realized.

Classroom Learning Experiences. As noted earlier, in large, departmentalized secondary schools, many adolescents report...