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Meeting Urban Science Students Where They Are: Perspectives from Two Physics Teachers and Four Schools¹

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The phrase ‘urban education’ tends to be used in ways that suggest we see urban education (and urban students) as a monolithic construct. Often, ‘urban’ indexes children of color, with low levels of academic readiness from low socio-economic status communities in crowded, under-resourced classrooms taught by poorly prepared and/or poorly motivated teachers. While teachers and students in urban schools do face challenges that those in more suburban or rural areas may not, we argue that the differences across urban school contexts, even within the same city, outweigh the similarities. Furthermore, these differences have profound implications for the kind of work urban science teachers must do and the support they need from the science and science education research communities. In this talk, two high school physics teachers with experience in four radically different urban teaching contexts discuss the differences across schools that shape their teaching practice and their students’ learning. Against this backdrop, we’ll address the most common ‘misconceptions’ about inquiry science teaching in urban schools that we’ve encountered among scientists, science education researchers and teacher educators. The presentation will conclude with our synthesis of how scientists and science education researchers can best support urban science teachers and students.

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