Minority Disproportionality in Special Education and the Achievement Gap: Common Issues, Shared Solutions

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Examine connections between achievement and disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse children

Explore alternate paths to meaningful data concerning the interaction between school factors and students placed at risk for school failure

Provide recommendations for staff development activities aimed at building consensus, capacity and shared accountability
Common Issues

- Historical Contexts
- Longitudinal Outcome Data
- Minority Disproportionality
- Poverty/ Social Economic Status
Educational Impact

Social and Legislative Factors

- Educational Access
- Educational Resources
- Teacher Preparation
- Pedagogy of Diversity
Minority Disproportionality is a Problem when:

- Children are inappropriately placed in special programs for MR students.

- Placement results from receiving poor quality regular education services.

- Academic relevance and the special education instructional quality impede educational progress or the return to the regular classrooms.

*National Academy of Sciences. (Heller et al., 1982)*
Six Potential Causes of Disproportion in EMR Programs

1. Legal and Administrative Requirements
2. Student Characteristics
3. Instructional Quality
4. Possible Assessment Process Biases
5. Home and Family Characteristics
6. Broader Historical and Cultural Contexts

National Academy of Sciences. (Heller et al., 1982)
Stages of the General-to-Special Education Continuum of Service

Stage 1
CLASSROOM TEACHER

Stage 2
INITIAL REFERRAL

Stage 3
DISABILITY IDENTIFICATION

Stage 4
SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE

Stage 5
Return to Regular Education/Mainstreaming
Possible Factors Related to Racial Disproportionality

Stage 1
TEACHER/CLASSROOM
- Interventions
- Teacher Perceptions
- Cultural Competencies

Stage 2
REFERRAL
- Learning Paradigms
- Tolerance

Stage 3
EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT
- Assessment Practices
- Cultural Competencies

Stage 4
SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES
- Service Efficacy
- Progress Criteria

Possible Factors Related to Racial Disproportionality
LEA Profile Questions
Student, School, and Procedural

- How do student and educational service profile characteristics differ?

- How do precipitating educational events differ?

- What are the similarities and differences in the educational profiles of low versus medium to high-SES students classified as ________?
Do schools with disproportionate suspension rates for African American students have similarly high rates for African American students receiving special education services for learning and behavior problems?
Group Profile Differences: Classification & Movement

General student profile characteristics and their interactions with race group membership:

- Changes in Service Intensity
- Free and Reduced Meals
- Grade Levels
- Intensity of Service
- Previously Classified
- Years Receiving _____ Services.
- Years in Special Education
Using “Untapped” Data

- Standard School Documents
- Anecdotal Information:
  - Classroom Intervention Strategies
  - Special Staffing/Consultations
- Intervention Team Process:
  - Frequency of Team Meeting Recommendations
  - Reviews
- Health Records
- Informal Discipline History
Instructional strategies - Changes to the method, context, or program made in response to a specific academic need evidenced by the student.

Behavioral strategies - Behavioral accommodations implemented or initiated by the classroom teacher to address behavioral difficulties.

Administrative strategies - Accommodations provided to the student by an administrator (i.e., principal or assistant principal) outside of the classroom setting.
Intervention Clusters

Instructional Strategy Cluster

- Assignment monitoring sheet
- Adapted resource room service curricula
- Adapted non-disabled materials
- Varied instructional groups
- Individual instruction
Intervention Clusters

Behavioral Strategy Cluster

- Behavior management
- Student-teacher contract
- Classroom/teacher change

Administrative Strategy Cluster

- Student conference
- Refer student to counselor
- Refer student to school psychologist
- Refer student/family to outside (external) agency
Initial Referral Process Characteristics

Finding
- Overall number of EMT meetings engaged for both African American and White students in the study district was extremely low.

Implication
- Pervasive void of documentation or the use of team planning processes to develop comprehensive interventions for students experiencing behavioral difficulties, irrespective of race.
Time Interval for Team Intervention Processes

Finding

- African American students experienced *substantially longer* periods of time between EMT interventions than White students, with the exception of those recommended prior to referral for special education (SED) screening.

Implication

- Relatively *rapid* transition to decisions to formally refer African Americans for SED services, whereas the process is *delayed* for White students.
Time Interval for Team Intervention Processes

Implication

- Results in fewer opportunities extended for comprehensive intervention for students thus, teachers are *less likely to observe positive changes* in problem behaviors.
Group Profile Differences

Finding

- African American students are *newly* classified at almost twice rate of their White peers and roughly twice the rate of newly classified SED students in the school system overall.

- Race, SES status and grade level uniquely influence the length of time students receive SED

_African American high school students received longer periods of SED service than poor White students, while the length of service rates in elementary and middle school are more similar among poor and non-poor students._
Differential Special Education Experiences

Finding

- African Americans were classified at *higher intensities* of SED services

- If regular education represents the point of origin of the special education continuum, then African American students classified farther along the continuum than White students will need longer periods of time to make the transition back to regular education programs.
Differential Special Education experiences

Implication
African American students placed in more intensive special education settings are subject to diminished opportunities for mainstream educational experiences.
Program Implications

Systematic monitoring of multidisciplinary intervention processes

- Provides important evaluative information to schools to inform staff development needs

- Provides information on the efficacy of intervention practices within general education prior to determining the appropriateness of special education referral
Poverty and Minority Achievement

**Facts:**

Persistent Variable

Higher incidence in urban and rural settings

Exacerbates other risk factors

Correlates with low academic achievement
Poverty and Minority Achievement

School Implications
Under-resourced schools
High mobility
Teacher/program quality issues
School readiness skill needs

Parental and Community Implications
Lower levels of parental educational attainment
Marginalized school experiences
Family & social stressors
Challenges

- "A Full Plate"
- Incorporating new Knowledge/Strategies
  - The Change Process
- Organizational Challenges
- Personnel Preparation
Professional development experiences which enhance educator’s abilities to promote achievement through:

- Developing Academic Skills
- Fostering Academic Esteem
- Developing Talent
- Enhancing Social Skills
- Nurturing Academic Motivation
Shared Solutions: Comprehensive School Reform

- Effective research-based methods and strategies
- Comprehensive design with aligned components
- Professional development
- Measurable goals and benchmarks
- Supports within the schools
- Parental and community involvement
- External technical supports and assistance
- Evaluation strategies
- Coordination of resources
Shared Solutions: Building Capacity

- Focus professional development (sustained and supportive) to produce instructional problem-solvers and shared accountability for student success;
- Implement intensive two-tiered educational interventions to improve foundation and analytic skills;
- Invest in parent training to develop “educational liaisons”; and
- Facilitate community partnerships to reinforce high achievement