MOVING TOWARDS EQUITY:
ADDRESSING DISPROPORTIONALITY IN
SPECIAL EDUCATION IN INDIANA

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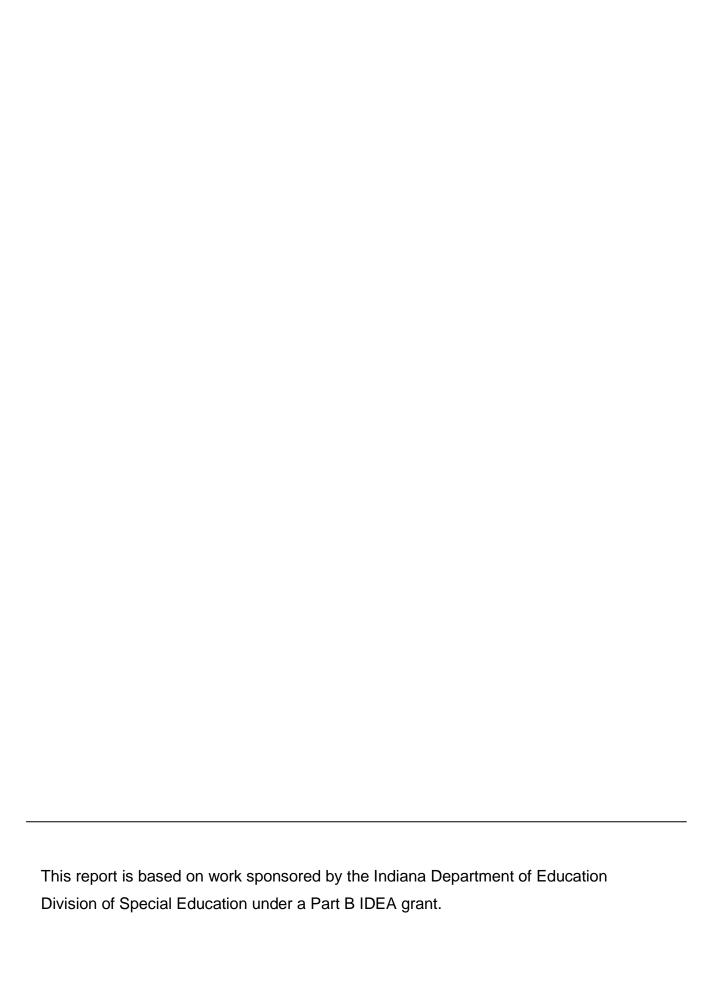**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**
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MOVING TOWARDS EQUITY:
ADDRESSING DISPROPORTIONALITY IN
SPECIAL EDUCATION IN INDIANA

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The disproportionate representation of minority students in special education has been among the most persistent unsolved issues in the field, defying simple explanations for its causes and remedies. Since 2000, the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (formerly Indiana Education Policy Center) has collaborated with the Indiana Department of Education Division of Exceptional Learners to track and address the issue of ethnic disproportionality in special education in the state of Indiana.

- The current report updates prior analyses and activities of the Indiana Disproportionality Project (IDP) regarding the issue of ethnic disproportionality in the state.

- Over the course of the project, the IDP collaboration has moved from description of the problem of disproportionality, to attempting to better understand the root causes of racial disparities, to providing support and technical assistance to school corporations seeking to address the issue of ethnic disproportionality in special education.

Chapter 2: Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education: Statewide and School Corporation Analysis

This chapter addresses the question, "Are ethnic minorities disproportionately represented in special education and in certain educational settings in our state?" The chapter presents data on special education enrollment and placement in Indiana for the 2003-04 school year, and identifies school corporations with evidence of statistically significant levels of disproportionality.

- Overrepresentation of African American students appears to be most severe in the special education categories of *Emotional Disability* (ED), *Mild Mental Disability* (MiMD), and *Moderate Mental Disability* (MoMD).

- In terms of educational settings, African American students are under-represented in *Regular Class* settings and overrepresented in all more restrictive educational settings except *Resource Rooms*.

- At the state level, Hispanic students are overrepresented in *Separate Class* settings. At the school corporation level, there appears to be some overrepresentation of Hispanic students in Resource Room settings.

- American Indian students are overrepresented in the disability categories of *Hearing Impairment* (HI), *Severe Mental Disability* (SMD), and *Traumatic Brain*

Injury (TBI), and in *Public Residential* and *Private Residential* educational settings.

- If anything, disproportionality in placement appears to be more severe than in disability category.

- At the corporation level, disproportionality of African American students is primarily an issue of *over*-representation, while for Hispanic students, the predominant issue is *under*-representation.

Chapter 3: Taking Action: Addressing Disproportionality through the Local Equity Action Development Projects

During the past reporting year, Local Equity Action Development (LEAD) projects have been developed and implemented by school personnel in eight school corporations to target the perceived causes of disproportionality in each local context.

- Over the past two years, eight planning districts have begun using their own data and resources to develop and implement Local Equity Action Development (LEAD) projects that address issues of ethnic disproportionality.

- Pilot plans focus on increasing family involvement at the early childhood level, providing to principals professional development on cultural competency, enhancing the effectiveness of the General Education Intervention (GEI) process, and increasing individual academic support for at-risk students through literacy instruction.

- Developing a district-level sense of ownership for ethnic disproportionality has been a complex process involving the use of data to initiate more general conversations about the impact of race on school policies, practices, and outcomes.

- To improve the probability of sustainability, plans to address ethnic disproportionality should be linked with other existing district initiatives such as School Improvement Plans.

Chapter 4: How Do We Measure Change: The Referral to Eligibility Ratio

Chapter 4 focuses on describing the development and application of a simple measure to address the question, "How do we evaluate the impact of school-based changes on ethnic disproportionality?" We advocate school use of the Referral to Eligibility Ratio for assessing the efficiency, equity, and short-term effectiveness of school-based changes on the special education pre-referral intervention and referral processes.

- The Referral to Eligibility Ratio is a way to track disproportionality through the stages of the pre-referral intervention process, to assess the effectiveness of the

pre-referral intervention and referral processes, and to evaluate the effects of short-term changes in school-based processes on disproportionality.

- School corporations have responded favorably to the concept of the ratio. Its practical adoption will be aided by the development of a software tool to facilitate data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5: Examining Our Assumptions: Factors that Do and Do Not Contribute to Disproportionality

Chapter 5 summarizes two studies undertaken to address the questions, "To what extent can poverty explain disproportionality?" and "How do we explain African American disproportionality in the least restrictive environment?" In both studies, we found that the evidence fails to support common explanations for the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in special education and in more restrictive environments.

Study I: To What Extent Can Poverty Explain Disproportionality?

- In these analyses, poverty makes a weak and inconsistent contribution to predicting ethnic disproportionality at the school corporation level.

- Examining the individual disability categories, there was no relationship between corporation-level poverty and disproportionality in either *Emotional Disability* (ED) or *Moderate Mental Disability* (MoMD).

- In *Learning Disabilities* (LD) and *Communication Disorders* (CD), the relationship between corporation-level poverty and disproportionality was in the opposite direction to what was expected. Poorer districts had *lower* levels of disproportionality, and wealthier districts had *higher* levels of disproportionality.

- A corporation's suspension and expulsion rates emerged as the most powerful predictors of disproportionality among the factors that were examined. Higher suspension and expulsion rates were associated with higher rates of disproportionality in the categories of ED, MiMD, MoMD, and LD.

- African American students are more likely than their peers to be identified for special education services, regardless of corporation poverty level. However, the Black-White gap in eligibility for special education services widened as corporation-level poverty increased, suggesting that poverty may exacerbate pre-existing racial differences in special education identification.

- Together these data suggest that, while poverty is a factor that may predict special education referral and eligibility, it does not appear to be a key factor in explaining ethnic disproportionality in special education.

Study II: How Do We Explain African American Disproportionality in the Least Restrictive Environment?

- African American students were less likely to be served in less restrictive class settings than their peers with the same disability, and more likely than their peers with the same disability to be served in more restrictive class settings.

- In ED and MiMD, African Americans were consistently under-represented in the less restrictive settings and overrepresented in more restrictive settings.

- African American students were overrepresented to an even greater degree in *Separate Classes* in disability categories typically served in less restrictive settings, such as *Learning Disabilities* and *Communication Disorders*.

- Together these findings suggest that disproportionality in placement in more restrictive environments is not attributable simply to disproportionality in disability categories that are more likely to lead to more restrictive placements.

Chapter 6: Difficult Conversations: The Black-White Perspective Gap

In this chapter, we address the questions, "Why is it so difficult to talk about racial issues?" and "What can be done to break the silence around these issues?" We describe several explanations for the reluctance to engage in such conversations; suggest strategies for initiating conversations about racial issues as they impact school policies, practices, and academic performance; and describe possible outcomes of these "courageous conversations."

- IDP case study results parallel other research that has found a reticence on the part of school personnel, particularly White respondents, to directly discuss the issues of race. African American teachers seemed more aware of and articulate about the diversity in their classrooms.

- Issues of race may be difficult for White Americans to talk about because the perceived impact of race on their daily lives is dramatically less than that of Black Americans.

- For both White and Black Americans, discussions of race are often emotionally charged and can lead to negative outcomes such as anger, rejection, and misunderstanding.

- "Courageous conversations" (Pacific Education Group, 2004) that allow people to openly discuss their opinions in an environment of respect and civility can be an effective means of beginning to address issues of race in schools where disproportionality exists.

- Direct attention to issues of race in some participating districts has led to changed attitudes about race among teachers and administrators in one district and to the development of a diversity task force to examine equity issues for all students in another.

The data in this report present a mixed picture concerning the issue of ethnic disproportionality in special education in Indiana. On the one hand, the data continue to show disproportionality in disability categories and educational environments, especially for African American students. Yet on the other hand, a number of school corporations across the state have committed themselves to a process for addressing equity issues in special education. That process has led to change within districts, to the development of new measures to monitor progress at the local level, and in some cases to a district-wide commitment to address local equity issues across both general and special education. There is still much that we do not understand about the nature of disproportionality—in particular the issue of Hispanic under-representation needs to be more fully explored. Yet as Indiana's educators continue to make a commitment to address equity issues in general and special education, there can be no doubt the state of Indiana will gain valuable information and new perspectives that will assist in addressing this complex issue.

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INTRODUCTION

The disproportionate representation of students of color in special education is among the most critical and enduring problems in the field of special education. Despite court challenges (*Larry P. v. Riles*, 1979; *PASE v. Hannon,* 1980), federal reports (Heller, Holtzmann, & Messick, 1982; National Research Council, 2002), and abundant research on the issue (e.g., Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Hosp & Reschly, 2003; Serwatka, Deering, & Grant, 1995), the problem of the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education has persisted. Indeed, although the presence of minority overrepresentation has been consistently documented, it is fair to say that the full complexity of the problem has not yet been understood, nor has a clear picture emerged at the national level concerning the causes of disproportionality (National Research Council, 2002). To address the issue of disproportionate minority placement, the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 97) stressed the importance of efforts to "prevent the intensification of problems connected with mislabeling and high dropout rates among minority children with disabilities" (see Table 1).

In response to this mandate, the Indiana Disproportionality Project (IDP), a collaboration of the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, the Indiana Division of Exceptional Learners, and local education agencies, has worked to increase understanding of ethnic disproportionality in special education in this state. The project has as its goals to: a) describe the extent of disproportionality in Indiana, b) study variables that may increase our understanding of why ethnic disproportionality occurs, and c) work with local education agencies to develop strategies to address disproportionality. This report, the fourth in a series, describes a set of studies that deepen our understanding of disproportionality in Indiana. In particular, we describe a promising approach to addressing the problem currently being piloted in a number of LEA's in Indiana.

Table 1. Reporting Requirements for Discipline and Disproportionality: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Amendments of 1997, 20 USC sec. 1400 et. seq. (statute); 34 CFR 300 (regulations published in 1999).

§ 300.146 Suspension and expulsion rates.

The State must have on file with the Secretary information to demonstrate that the following requirements are met:

(a) General. The SEA examines data to determine if significant discrepancies are occurring in the rate of long-term suspensions and expulsions of children with disabilities-
    (1) Among LEAs in the State; or
    (2) Compared to the rates for nondisabled children within the agencies.
(b) Review and revision of policies. If the discrepancies described in paragraph (a) of this section are occurring, the SEA reviews and, if appropriate, revises (or requires the affected State agency or LEA to revise) its policies, procedures, and practices relating to the development and implementation of IEPs, the use of behavioral interventions, and procedural safeguards, to ensure that these policies, procedures, and practices comply with the Act.
(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 612(a) (22))

§ 300.755 Disproportionality

(a) General. Each State that receives assistance under Part B of the Act, and the Secretary of the Interior, shall provide for the collection and examination of data to determine if significant disproportionality based on race is occurring in the State or in the schools operated by the Secretary of the Interior with respect to –
    (1) The identification of children as children with disabilities, including the identification of children as children with disabilities in accordance with a particular impairment described in section 602(3) of the Act; and
    (2) The placement in particular educational settings of these children.
(b) Review and revision of policies, practices, and procedures. In the case of a determination of significant disproportionality with respect to the identification of children as children with disabilities, or the placement in particular educational settings of these children, in accordance with paragraph (a) of this section, the State or the Secretary of the Interior shall provide for the review and, if appropriate revision of the policies, procedures, and practices used in the identification or placement to ensure that the policies, procedures, and practices comply with the requirements of Part B of the Act.
(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1418 (c))

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD

Previous reports in this series (Skiba et al., 2000, 2001) reviewed important literature on the nature and extent of ethnic disproportionality in special education. In this section, we update those reviews by discussing some of the most current developments in the analysis of ethnic disproportionality.

National Research Council Report. At the request of the Council for Exceptional Children, the federal government convened a task force to study the current status of disproportionality and offer recommendations to remediate the problem. The resulting report, *Minority Students in Special and Gifted Education* (National Research Council, 2002), framed its analyses in terms of four questions, three of which attempted to assess the contribution of broad sets of factors to minority overrepresentation.

The extent to which biological, social, and environmental factors contribute to ethnic disproportionality constitutes the first of the four questions considered by the panel (National Research Council, 2002). The panel concluded that a number of biological, social, and stress-related factors associated with poverty contribute to the academic disadvantages that lead to special education referral, and that early intervention can make a significant difference in the school learning of students who arrive with poverty-related risk factors. The panel recommended a national commitment to early intervention programs to offset socioeconomic risk factors.

Second, the report investigated whether schooling contributes "to the incidence of special needs or giftedness among students in different racial/ethnic groups through the opportunities that it provides." The review found evidence that poor and minority students are more likely to be taught by teachers with less experience and expertise, in more poorly-funded schools that have difficulty recruiting and maintaining both teachers of color in particular and a sufficient teaching force in general. Further, students of color may face lowered expectations, or a cultural mismatch regarding expectations concerning ability (Heath, 1982) or behavior (Townsend, 2000). Finally, the panel concludes that impediments to parent participation linked to cultural differences may make students of color more vulnerable to referral and placement.

Third, the report explored the contribution of the special education eligibility process itself, assessing whether there is evidence that the current process is biased in terms of race or ethnicity. In its review, the panel found the evidence of bias at various points in the referral to

placement process to be mixed. The report concludes, however, that the entire process has sufficient conceptual and procedural shortcomings as to be unable to ensure that the "right students" are being identified. Further, the panel contended that the entire process is weighted toward referral and placement only after a student has experienced failure, thus ensuring that children's problems will be relatively intractable by the time they are finally placed in special education (Kauffman, 1999).

Finally, the report explored whether placement in special education is a benefit or a risk, especially for different racial or ethnic groups. While the evidence proved to be equivocal, the report concluded that there is strong support for moving towards a model of early identification and intervention. Towards that end, the report offered a number of recommendations for practice, research, and policy at the federal and state level.

Civil Rights Project Report. A second important recent resource addressing the issue is a compilation from the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, *Racial Inequity in Special Education* (Losen & Orfield, 2002). Descriptions of disproportionality showed that disproportionality is most severe in the categories of mild mental retardation and emotional disturbance, especially among African American students (Parrish, 2002), although overrepresentation is of increasing concern among English-language learners as well (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002). In addition to disproportionate placement in some disability categories, Fierros and Conroy (2002) documented minority overrepresentation in more restrictive special education placements, and under-representation in less restrictive settings. Although, as noted above, poverty has been identified as an important factor contributing to high rates of special education identification among minority students, a number of authors presented data suggesting that the relationship between race and poverty in predicting special education placement may be more complex than originally thought (Losen & Orfield, 2002; Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002; Parrish, 2002). Harry, Klingner, Sturges, and Moore (2002) presented the results of an ethnographic field study showing that, among other things, the special education identification and eligibility process may be arbitrary or idiosyncratic at a number of points. Finally, other chapters in this compilation explored the contributions of quality of schooling (Osher, Woodruff, & Sims, 2002), high-stakes testing (Heubert, 2002), and legal and policy issues (Glennon, 2002; Hehir, 2002; Soltman & Moore, 2002) to disproportionality.

THE INDIANA DISPROPORTIONALITY PROJECT

In 1998, soon after the passage of the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Indiana Department of Education Division of Exceptional Learners began contracting with the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (formerly the Indiana Education Policy Center) to monitor ethnic disproportionality in the state of Indiana. To this point, the Indiana Disproportionality Project (IDP) collaboration has resulted in three reports to the state on the topic (a timeline describing the activities of the project may be found in Appendix D).

The first report of the project (Skiba et al., 2000) found disproportionality across the state for African American students in the categories *Emotional Disability—Full-Time* (EDFT), *Mild Mental Disability* (MiMD), and *Moderate Mental Disability* (MoMD). Some disproportionality was also found for Hispanic and American Indian students in the category *Severe Mental Disability* (SMD). In addition, African American students tended to be under-represented in *Regular Class* placement, and overrepresented in more restrictive placements, especially *Separate Class*. Analyses at the planning district level also showed a number of special education planning districts with significant ethnic disproportionality in the categories *Mild Mental Disability, Emotional Disability—Full Time*, and *Communication Disorders*, and in the placements *Regular Class* and *Separate Class*.

A follow-up report (Skiba et al., 2001) replicated and expanded upon these analyses. Statewide results showed a similar pattern of disproportionality to the first report, and extended the local analysis from the planning district to the school corporation level. Those analyses suggested that, where disproportionality occurs, it is not evenly distributed within planning districts, but rather tends to be concentrated in only some school corporations. The report also explored how the students with disabilities were disciplined, finding that IDEA disciplinary provisions are used more frequently for students with disabilities in certain school corporations, and that there is also ethnic disproportionality in the use of special education disciplinary provisions. Finally, a review of the extant literature in special education revealed three factors that appear to contribute to special education disproportionality: demographics, educational opportunity, and the referral and educational process.

The progress from describing to understanding disproportionality in the state of Indiana continued with the third report, *The Context of Disproportionality* (Skiba et al., 2003a). This report described an intensive case study, interviewing 66 educators—teachers, principals, school psychologists, and special education directors—about their perspectives on special education and culture. Analysis of the rich data from those conversations led to a number of findings, including:

- Teachers and schools feel highly challenged to meet the needs of students with economic disadvantages. Many teachers feel that they are provided with insufficient resources to meet those challenges.

- Classroom behavior appears to be an especially challenging issue for many teachers, and cultural gaps and misunderstandings may increase the contribution of behavioral issues.

- High-stakes testing may be one factor that contributes to the referral of disadvantaged students.

- Most teachers reported making substantial efforts to meet the needs of all their children before considering a special education referral. But many also felt there are too few resources available to help students who are struggling.

- Pre-referral or general education intervention teams may be useful in supporting teachers working with students with academic or behavioral challenges. But the use and perceived effectiveness of those teams appears to vary widely.

- Perceiving special education as the only resource available for helping students who are not succeeding, classroom teachers may err in the direction of over-referral if it means they can access more resources for their neediest students.

- There was clear discomfort among many respondents in discussing issues of race. These difficulties in communication may hamper problem-solving efforts.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

Thus, the Indiana Disproportionality Project has moved from measuring the extent of disproportionate service in Indiana, to studying the factors that may create and maintain disproportionality, to beginning to formulate a process to address disproportionality at the local

level. This report is an update of data and activities in the state of Indiana regarding this issue, revealing both significant progress and a number of challenges remaining in addressing the problem.

Chapter 2 once again revisits state- and corporation-level data on the relative rates of service in special education for different racial/ethnic groups in the state of Indiana. Since the last report, there has been substantial movement at the national level towards a standardized set of measures to track over- and under-representation. The analyses in Chapter 2 use these emerging measures to describe the current state of ethnic disproportionality at the state and local levels.

In response to the results of the *Context of Disproportionality* study, a number of participating school corporations volunteered to begin a process that could address disproportionality at the local level. That collaboration, described in Chapter 3, has led to the development of the Local Equity Action Development (LEAD) projects in eight school corporations in Indiana. In that chapter, we describe the LEAD process, designed to address issues of inequity in special education, and some initial outcomes in the participating districts.

In any process of change and restructuring, it is extremely important to have solid data available to assess progress towards one's goals. Chapter 4 describes the Referral-to-Eligibility Ratio, a measure suggested by and being implemented in participating school corporations, that may provide a more satisfactory short-term measure of change for local systems change efforts.

To be maximally effective in understanding and addressing complex issues, it is necessary to operate out of realistic assumptions. Chapter 5 presents the results of two studies examining common assumptions about ethnic disproportionality in the areas of race and poverty and the under-representation of African American students in less restrictive environments. In both cases, the results prove somewhat surprising and counterintuitive.

Finally, at the urging of the IDP advisory board, Chapter 6 directly addresses the issue of race. Our nation's tragic past has left a legacy that permeates both schools and society; yet that same legacy has also made it awkward and uncomfortable to openly discuss the topic of race and racial disparity. Chapter 6 discusses the problem of talking about race, and in particular describes the efforts of school corporations to have "courageous conversations" that directly face and discuss issues of equity at the local level.

ETHNIC DISPROPORTIONALITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: STATEWIDE AND SCHOOL CORPORATION ANALYSIS

Since 1998, the state of Indiana has been working to describe, understand, and address ethnic disproportionality in special education. This chapter presents the results of continuing analyses of ethnic disproportionality in special education categories and placement options across the state and in specific local educational agencies, in order to fulfill the reporting requirements of the IDEA 97. The data analyzed for this report are drawn from the 2003-04 school year CODA database. To ensure that the findings from the first year of the report are stable across time, these analyses compared data from the 1998-99 school year with data from the 2003-04 school year. Particular attention is given to the disproportionality of African American and Hispanic students with respect to overall enrollment in special education, enrollment in specific disability categories, and placement in educational settings.

This chapter opens with general information on numbers and percentages of students with disabilities by ethnicity. Then we present analyses on disproportionality in disability categories and educational environments. Finally, the chapter closes with a summary identifying those school corporations that show consistent evidence of statistically significant levels of disproportionality across a number of disability categories and educational environments.

Method

Data sources. Two data sets were used to explore the extent of disproportionality in special education enrollment across Indiana's 304 school corporations for the 2003-04 school year. General enrollment figures for each school corporation in the state were obtained from the Indiana Department of Education. Data for disability category and placement type for each of Indiana's school corporations were drawn from the Indiana Uniform Ethnic and Racial Questionnaire and the Indiana Uniform Federal Placement Questionnaire (Section E: Race/Ethnicity of Children with Disabilities Ages 6-21 by Educational Environment) collected by the Indiana Department of Education Division of Exceptional Learners.

A note on the measures in this report. When the first report on ethnic disproportionality in Indiana was completed (Skiba et al., 2000), there was little national consensus on how best to interpret statistics on disproportionality. Since then, however, increased attention to the topic has resulted in an emerging consensus concerning appropriate ways to measure and describe the extent of ethnic disproportionality (Hosp & Reschly, 2003; National Research Council, 2002; Parrish, 2002). In particular, three indices have been described in this literature (see Appendix C for further details on the measures and their calculation).

The *composition index* (CI) is the proportion of the total enrollment in a given disability category represented by a given ethnicity. Thus we might find, for example, that although African American students comprise 12% of the general school enrollment, they represent 17% of those served in the category *Emotional Disability*.[1]

The *risk index* (RI) represents the proportion of a given ethnic group placed in a specific disability category in special education. If, in a school corporation, 4% of all African American students are identified as *Learning Disabled*, the risk of an African American student being identified as LD is 4 out of 100, resulting in a risk index of .04.

The concept of risk implies a comparison: How does this level of risk compare to other groups? To understand the meaning of the risk index, we compare the risk index of the group of interest to other groups by computing a *relative risk ratio* (RRR). For example, in our hypothetical school corporation, we might find that only 2% of White students were identified as *LD*. We would then conclude that since 4% of African American students in this corporation were identified as LD, they are twice as likely as White students to be identified as *LD* (*RRR* = 4%/2% = 2.0). A *relative risk ratio* greater than 1.0 indicates that the group under consideration is at greater risk for identification than another ethnic group or groups. A relative risk ratio less than 1.0 means that the risk for identification is less for the group under consideration relative to other groups.

When is a discrepancy disproportionality? We know there are discrepancies among ethnic groups in terms of special education service; but at what point are those discrepancies large enough to conclude that they represent evidence of disproportionality? For purposes of analyzing state-level data, we used two criteria. To interpret the *composition index* (CI), we use

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[1] An example may clarify the concept of CI better. Assume that a school corporation serves 200 students in the MD category and 30 of them are African Americans. Therefore, CI=30/200=0.15, or 15%. It is important to compare this to the percentage of African Americans in the general school enrollment.

criteria suggested by Chinn and Hughes (1987) suggesting that disproportionality is present if the target group's representation in special education differs from their enrollment by greater than 10% of their total enrollment. Thus, if Hispanic students represent 15% of the student enrollment, their enrollment in special education is viewed as disproportionate if it falls outside of a range of 1.5% on either side of that figure (13.5% - 16.5%). To interpret *relative risk ratios*, levels of at least 1.5 times discrepant for overrepresentation and .75 times discrepant for under-representation are used to identify levels of disproportionality meriting further consideration (Westat, 2003). At the state level, a determination of disproportionality was made when criteria for both *composition index* and *relative risk ratio* were met.

Results

Overall Ethnic Representation in Special Education

Table 2a presents the overall ethnic breakdown of enrollment in Indiana's public schools. Since 1998-99, overall enrollment for White, non-Hispanic students has shown a slight decline, while the number of students and the percentage of total enrollment for other ethnic groups have increased. This trend is most conspicuous for Hispanic students, who have grown from 2.79% of total state enrollment in the 1998-99 school year to 4.66% of general school enrollment in the 2003-04 school year.

Table 2a: Distribution of Student Enrollment in Indiana Public Schools by Ethnic Group, 1998-99 and 2003-04 School Years

Ethnicity	Number of Students		Percentage of Total Enrollment	
	1998-99	2003-2004	1998-99	2003-2004
White, non-Hispanic	828,578	807,606	83.89%	79.74
African-American	111,010	120,309	11.24%	11.88
Hispanic	27,595	47,208	2.79%	4.66
Asian	8,641	11,126	0.87%	1.10
American Indian	1,917	2,462	0.19%	0.24
Multiracial	9,932	24,135	1.01%	2.38
Total	**987,673**	**1,012,846**	**100%**	**100%**

Table 2b disaggregates total special education enrollment by ethnic group. As in total enrollment, the percentage of enrollment in special education rose slightly for all ethnic groups, except for White, non-Hispanic students. African American, American Indian, and Multiracial students continue to be somewhat overrepresented in special education relative to their proportion of total enrollment, while Hispanic and Asian students appeared to be somewhat under-represented in special education relative to their share of the total enrollment.

Table 2b. Distribution of Student Enrollment in Special Education by Ethnic Group, 1998-99 and 2003-04 School Years

Ethnicity	Number of Students in Special Education		Percentage of Special Education Enrollment	
	1998-99	2003-04	1998-99	2003-04
White, non-Hispanic	112,050	124,690	84.99%	81.61%
African-American	16,274	20,246	12.34%	13.25%
Hispanic	2,223	4,412	1.69%	2.89%
Asian	349	525	0.26%	0.34%
American Indian	193	277	0.15%	0.18%
Multiracial	749	2,637	0.57%	1.73%
Total	**131,838**	**152,787**	**100%**	**100%**

Ethnic Representation in Specific Disability Categories

Table 2c presents enrollment in Article VII disability categories disaggregated by ethnicity. For each ethnic group, two columns are presented. The first, the *composition index* (CI), is the percentage of a disability category that a given ethnic group represents. The CI for an ethnic group in a particular category can be interpreted by comparing the percentage of that group served in the disability category to the percentage enrollment for that ethnic group listed at the bottom of each column.

For example, although African American students represent almost 12% of the school population in Indiana (bottom of column 4), the CI for African American students in the category MiMD shows that they represent 30.2% of all students in that category. A similar comparison of the MiMD CI and enrollment percentage for White students in MiMD suggests that Indiana serves fewer than expected White students in that category. The second column for each ethnic group is the *relative risk ratio* (RRR) compared to all other ethnic groups combined, showing

Table 2c. Disproportionality in Disability Category by Ethnicity, 2003-04

Disability Category	White, non-Hispanic CI(%)	RRR	African American CI(%)	RRR	Hispanic CI(%)	RRR	Asian CI(%)	RRR	American Indian CI(%)	RRR	Multiracial CI(%)	RRR
ASD	85.4%	1.48	9.8%	0.81	1.9%	0.40	0.9%	0.84	0.0%	0.00	1.9%	0.81
CD	86.7%	1.65	8.0%	0.64	3.0%	0.63	0.5%	0.45	0.2%	0.62	1.7%	0.69
DB	66.7%	0.51	20.0%	1.85	0.0%	0.00	0.0%	0.00	0.0%	0.00	13.3%	6.30
EDAO	83.7%	1.31	12.4%	1.05	1.0%	0.22	0.3%	0.24	0.2%	1.03	2.3%	0.97
EDFT	69.1%	0.57	25.9%	2.60	2.0%	0.43	0.1%	0.11	0.3%	1.15	2.5%	1.05
HI	83.0%	1.24	10.5%	0.87	3.4%	0.72	1.2%	1.05	0.4%	1.58	1.6%	0.67
LD	83.7%	1.30	11.2%	0.94	3.1%	0.66	0.2%	0.20	0.2%	0.81	1.6%	0.66
MD	82.3%	1.18	12.3%	1.04	2.7%	0.56	0.7%	0.64	0.2%	0.65	1.8%	0.75
MiMD	64.6%	0.46	30.2%	3.21	3.2%	0.68	0.2%	0.18	0.1%	0.57	1.6%	0.68
MoMD	70.6%	0.61	22.6%	2.17	4.4%	0.94	0.3%	0.31	0.2%	0.64	1.9%	0.78
OHI	87.9%	1.85	7.8%	0.62	1.4%	0.29	0.4%	0.33	0.3%	1.16	2.3%	0.96
OI	86.9%	1.68	6.6%	0.52	3.4%	0.73	1.4%	1.30	0.0%	0.00	1.7%	0.70
SMD	72.4%	0.67	18.7%	1.71	5.8%	1.27	0.7%	0.68	0.4%	1.85	1.8%	0.75
TBI	84.4%	1.38	11.6%	0.98	2.8%	0.58	0.0%	0.00	0.4%	1.63	0.8%	0.33
VI	83.4%	1.28	12.6%	1.07	1.8%	0.37	0.6%	0.53	0.0%	0.00	1.6%	0.67
% in Enrollment	79.74%		11.88%		4.66%		1.10%		0.24%		2.38%	

how much more or less likely that group is to be served in that disability category.[2] For African American students in the category MiMD, the RRR is 3.21, meaning that African Americans were over 3 times as likely to be labeled MiMD than students in other ethnic groups. The White, non-Hispanic students' RRR is 0.46, which indicates that White students are 0.46 times as likely to be served in MiMD as students in all other ethnic groups.

Looking across the data in Table 2c, African American students, relative to other ethnic groups, are overrepresented in the disability categories of *Emotional Disability—Full-Time* (EDFT), *Mild Mental Disability* (MiMD), *Moderate Mental Disability* (MoMD), *Severe Mental Disability* (SMD), *and Deaf-Blind* (DB). American Indian students were overrepresented in three disability categories: *Hearing Impairment* (HI), *Severe Mental Disability* (SMD), *and Traumatic Brain Injury* (TBI).[3] Finally, Multiracial students were overrepresented in the category of *Deaf-Blind* (DB). White, non-Hispanic students were overrepresented in the category *Other Health Impairment* (OHI).

Ethnic Representation in Special Education Educational Environments

IDEA 97 mandates that students with disabilities be served in the least restrictive environment (LRE) that is appropriate given their needs. Table 2d shows the distribution of placements for all ethnic groups across educational environments. Column 1 represents the distribution of students with disabilities in various settings. Thus, across all students in the state of Indiana, about 59% of students with disabilities were served in *Regular Class* settings; about 25% were served in *Resource Rooms* and about 15% in *Separate Class* settings.[4] The remainder of the columns in Table 2d represents the distribution of students in different educational environments disaggregated by ethnicity.[5] In the 2003-04 school year, African American students were under-represented in *Regular Class* placement, proportionally represented in

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[2] The RRR is the ratio of the *risk index* for the group under consideration compared to all other ethnic groups. Note that for ease of interpretation, the *risk index* figures are not presented here, but may be found in the complete tables in Appendices A and B.

[3] Note that since Asian, Multiracial, and American Indian students represent a very small proportion of the total enrollment in special education, the values of RRR should be interpreted cautiously.

[4] *Regular Class* refers to being out of the general education classroom for less than 21% of the school day; *Resource Room* refers to placement outside the general education classroom between 21% and 59% of the school day, and *Separate Class* refers to placement outside the general education classroom for 60% or more of the school day.

[5] It should be noted that since only students with disabilities are placed in these special education environments, the appropriate enrollment comparison for the *composition indices* (CI) and *relative risk ratios* (RRR) presented in Table 2d is enrollment in special education, not general enrollment (as used in previous tables).

Table 2d. Distribution of Students in Special Education Educational Environments by Ethnicity, 2003-04 School Year

Placement Type	Placement* Percentage	White,non-Hispanic		African American		Hispanic		Asian		American Indian		Multiracial	
		CI(%)	RRR	CI(%)	RRR	CI(%)	RRR	CI(%)	RRR	CI(%)	RRR	CI(%)	RRR
Regular Class	59.00%	86.7%	1.48	8.69%	0.62	2.39%	0.83	0.38%	1.14	0.18%	0.96	1.68%	0.97
Resource Room	24.55%	81.0%	0.96	13.70%	1.03	3.25%	1.13	0.23%	0.69	0.17%	0.94	1.68%	0.98
Separate Class	15.04%	63.1%	0.39	30.24%	2.81	4.25%	1.50	0.30%	0.89	0.22%	1.23	1.93%	1.12
Public Separate	42.90%	73.0%	0.61	23.03%	1.94	1.26%	0.43	0.32%	0.94	0.16%	0.86	2.21%	1.29
Private Separate	7.71%	71.9%	0.58	25.44%	2.21	0.00%	0.00	0.88%	2.62	0.00%	0.00	1.75%	1.02
Public Residential	13.60%	63.2%	0.39	27.36%	2.44	3.98%	1.40	3.48%	10.67	0.50%	2.73	1.49%	0.86
Private Residential	29.57%	67.5%	0.47	25.40%	2.21	2.52%	0.87	0.00%	0.00	0.46%	2.51	4.12%	2.45
Homebound/Hospital	46.89%	76.3%	0.73	20.20%	1.64	1.73%	0.60	0.14%	0.43	0.14%	0.79	1.44%	0.83
% by Ethnicity		81.6%		13.25%		2.89%		0.34%		0.18%		1.73%	

* Represents the percentage of all students with disabilities placed in that particular educational environment.

Resource Room placement, and overrepresented in every more restrictive educational placement from *Separate Class* to *Homebound/Hospital*. For example, African Americans represent 13.25% of those served in special education, but 30.2% of those in *Separate Classes*. Thus, African American students with disabilities are 2.8 times as likely as students with disabilities from other ethnic groups to be served in a *Separate Class*. It is interesting to note that the disproportionality in rates of service in various educational environments for African American students appears to be greater than the disproportionality seen in disability categories (*cf.* Table 2c).

There were also some educational environments that showed evidence of disproportionality for other ethnic groups. Hispanic students were overrepresented in *Separate Class* settings; Asian students were overrepresented in *Private Separate* and *Public Residential* settings; American Indian students were overrepresented in *Public Residential* and *Private Residential* settings, and Multiracial students were overrepresented in *Private Residential* settings.[6]

Estimates of Disproportionality Across Time

It has now been five years since the state of Indiana first began monitoring ethnic disproportionality in its special education programs. It is fair then, to ask if there are any trends across that time period. Table 2e presents a comparison of *composition indices* for African American and Hispanic students for the state of Indiana, comparing the 1998-99, 2000-01, and 2003-04 school years for all disability categories.[7] Similar comparisons are presented for educational environments in Table 2f. Across a number of disability categories and settings, disparities in rates of special education services among various ethnic groups appear to be widening. Certainly, as the proportion of minority students in Indiana increases, we would expect that the proportion which those students represented in special education would also increase. But the highlighted cells in Tables 2e and 2f show those categories and placements in which disproportionality appears to be increasing over and above statewide changes in ethnic enrollment proportions.

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[6] Again, due to lower numbers of Asian, American Indian, and Multiracial students served in special education, absolute indices of disproportionality should be interpreted with caution.

[7] Since *risk indices* and *relative risk ratios* were not computed in previous reports, Table 2e compares only the composition indices across the three reports.

Table 2e. Distribution by Ethnic Group within Disability Categories by School Year 1998-2004

Disability Category	White, Non-Hispanic			African American			Hispanic		
	1998-99	1999-00	2003-04	1998-99	1999-00	2003-04	1998-99	1999-00	2003-04
ASD	86.82%	86.68%	85.40%	10.95%	10.34%	9.8%	0.96%	1.15%	1.9%
CD	90.07%	89.70%	86.70%	7.35%	7.33%	8.0%	1.55%	1.75%	3.0%
DB	84.62%	83.33%	66.70%	11.54%	12.50%	20.0%	0.00%	0.00%	0.0%
EDAO	88.55%	87.82%	83.70%	9.77%	9.90%	12.4%	0.82%	1.05%	1.0%
EDFT	75.85%	74.90%	69.10%	21.66%	22.08%	25.9%	1.24%	1.45%	2.0%
HI	87.05%	86.13%	83%	9.36%	9.41%	10.5%	2.10%	2.55%	3.4%
LD	87.55%	86.87%	83.70%	9.89%	10.10%	11.2%	1.71%	1.95%	3.1%
MD	87.39%	85.58%	82.30%	9.10%	10.03%	12.3%	2.41%	2.58%	2.7%
MiMD	68.28%	67.29%	64.60%	28.68%	29.40%	30.2%	2.07%	2.16%	3.2%
MoMD	75.91%	76.06%	70.60%	20.07%	19.53%	22.6%	2.53%	2.67%	4.4%
OHI	92.09%	91.31%	87.90%	5.82%	6.22%	7.8%	0.91%	0.87%	1.4%
OI	91.30%	89.84%	86.90%	5.58%	6.62%	6.6%	1.72%	2.31%	3.4%
SMD	80.47%	78.93%	72.40%	14.38%	15.71%	18.7%	3.40%	3.38%	5.8%
TBI	87.72%	86.28%	84.40%	9.27%	10.00%	11.6%	2.51%	2.33%	2.8%
VI	86.45%	85.88%	83.40%	10.54%	10.39%	12.6%	2.17%	3.25%	1.8%
Proportion in School Population	83.89%	83.22%	79.70%	11.24%	11.37%	12.00%	2.79%	3.04%	4.70%

NOTE: Shaded percentages indicate overrepresentation according to *Chinn & Hughes' "P + 10% of P" criterion (1987).*

Table 2f. Distribution in Special Education Placement by Ethnic Group by School Year, 1998-2004

Placement Type	White, non-Hispanic			African American			Hispanic		
	1998-99	1999-00	2003-04	1998-99	1999-00	2003-04	1998-99	1999-00	2003-04
Regular Class	89.51%	89.72%	86.69%	8.22%	7.54%	8.69%	1.32%	1.56%	2.39%
Resource Room	86.16%	84.42%	80.96%	11.13%	12.48%	13.70%	1.74%	2.00%	3.25%
Separate Class	73.06%	72.13%	63.06%	23.34%	23.92%	30.24%	2.53%	2.59%	4.25%
Public Separate School Facility	83.03%	82.45%	73.03%	14.33%	14.91%	23.03%	2.14%	1.55%	1.26%
Private Separate School Facility	58.33%	78.57%	71.93%	41.67%	21.43%	25.44%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Public Residential Facility	78.57%	60.25%	63.18%	18.18%	38.11%	27.36%	1.30%	0.00%	3.98%
Private Residential Facility	88.74%	86.12%	67.51%	7.77%	9.81%	25.40%	1.88%	1.91%	2.52%
Homebound/ Hospital	82.17%	83.75%	76.33%	15.03%	14.11%	20.20%	2.62%	1.25%	1.73%
Proportion in School Population	83.89%	83.22%	81.52%	11.24%	11.37%	13.36%	2.79%	3.04%	2.87%

NOTE: Shaded percentages indicate overrepresentation according to *Chinn & Hughes' "P + 10% of P" criterion (1987).*

Where is Disproportionate Representation Most Serious?

To this point, we have considered disproportionality in statewide data for disability categories and educational environments. As in previous years, part of the mandate of IDEA 97 and thus the purpose of the Indiana effort, is to identify specific corporations in which disproportionality exists. As in past analyses, the data were broken down by corporation to examine over- or under-representation in disability categories and levels of placement. Thus, the remainder of this section will present data on the disproportionate representation of African American and Hispanic students in special education at the school corporation level. As in the previous sections, indices of disproportionality are the *composition index* and *relative risk ratio*. In addition, results of a statistical analysis, *chi-square*, are presented as a test of the probability that a level of disproportionality this large or larger could occur solely by chance. As noted in previous reports (e.g., Skiba et al., 2000), small numbers can make the results of tests of statistical significance unstable; thus, judgments concerning the significance of disproportionality at the corporation level are made only where there are more than ten students of a given ethnic group in the disability category or educational environment being considered.

As noted above, the way in which Indiana's disproportionality data are presented has shifted somewhat this year, in response to trends at the national level in this area. Table 2g presents the data for one disability category, *Mild Mental Disability*, for the 2003-04 school year for African American students, providing an example of how the presence or absence of disproportionality was ascertained. The table contains a summary of data for all corporations in the state in which there was significant overrepresentation of African American students in the category MiMD (complete statistics for all school corporations in all disability categories may be found in Appendix A). Columns C and D provide enrollment figures for all students and African American students respectively; Columns E and F represent the number of all students and African American students served in the category *Mild Mental Disability*. Column G is the *risk index*, the proportion of African Americans in a given corporation served in the category MiMD. Note that if this index is multiplied by 100, it represents the percentage of all African American students served in MiMD.

Table 2g. School Corporations with Statistically Significant Overrepresentation of African American Students: Mild Mental Disability, 2003-04

A Corporation Number	B School Corporation	C Total Enrollment	D Total African American Enrollment	E Total Students served in MiMD	F AfrAmer Students served in MiMD	G Risk Index[a]	H Relative Risk Ratio[b]	I Chi-Square	J Direction and Significance of Disprop.
235	Fort Wayne	33430	8309	920	521	0.06	3.95	511.42	Over, p<.001
255	East Allen	9954	1762	167	57	0.03	2.41	31.47	Over, p<.001
1010	Greater Clark	10268	1399	209	60	0.04	2.55	41.24	Over, p<.001
2270	Concord	5062	331	47	14	0.04	6.06	41.96	Over, p<.001
2305	Elkhart	13086	2118	239	112	0.05	4.57	168.88	Over, p<.001
2400	New Albany-Floyd	11736	751	185	25	0.03	2.29	15.88	Over, p<.001
2865	Marion	6075	1237	84	37	0.03	3.08	29.47	Over, p<.001
3005	Hamilton Southeastern	11710	533	59	10	0.02	4.28	20.98	Over, p<.001
3500	Kokomo-Center	6989	1081	198	50	0.05	1.85	14.92	Over, p<.001
4670	East Chicago	6444	2921	266	159	0.05	1.79	23.36	Over, p<.001
4690	Gary	16638	16203	939	926	0.06	1.91	5.91	Over, p<.05
4710	Hammond	13696	3524	197	87	0.03	2.28	35.54	Over, p<.001
4925	Michigan City	6761	2007	215	110	0.06	2.48	49.08	Over, p<.001
5275	Anderson	10315	2127	348	137	0.06	2.50	77.33	Over, p<.001
5300	Decatur	5626	551	129	38	0.07	3.85	57.78	Over, p<.001
5310	Franklin	6875	440	68	13	0.03	3.46	18.54	Over, p<.001
5330	Lawrence	16207	5125	222	128	0.03	2.95	70.56	Over, p<.001
5340	Perry	13514	1639	202	79	0.05	4.65	140.07	Over, p<.001
5350	Pike	10876	5985	214	181	0.03	4.48	77.03	Over, p<.001
5360	Warren	11753	4334	246	164	0.04	3.42	95.80	Over, p<.001
5370	Washington	11398	3968	125	90	0.02	4.82	77.02	Over, p<.001
5375	Wayne	14689	3982	244	121	0.03	2.65	63.46	Over, p<.001
5385	Indianapolis	40294	23320	1748	1229	0.05	1.72	115.88	Over, p<.001
5400	Speedway	1662	363	33	19	0.05	4.86	25.19	Over, p<.001
7200	Mishawaka	5661	203	122	10	0.05	2.40	7.67	Over, p<.01
7205	South Bend	21872	7885	536	333	0.04	2.91	162.06	Over, p<.001
7855	Lafayette	7532	531	118	16	0.03	2.07	7.75	Over, p<.01
7995	Evansville-Vanderburgh	23275	3343	515	200	0.06	3.79	256.42	Over, p<.001
8030	Vigo	16487	1050	344	35	0.03	1.67	8.53	Over, p<.01
8385	Richmond	5838	624	210	34	0.06	1.61	6.91	Over, p<.01

[a] Proportion of African American enrollment that are served in the category MiMD. Note that the *risk index* is equivalent to a percentage if multiplied by 100. Thus, for example, in Fort Wayne, 6.27% of all African American students are served in the category MiMD, while in East Allen, 3.23% of all African American students are served in MiMD programs.

[b] Comparison of the *risk index* of African Americans to the *risk index* for all other students.

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The final three columns in Table 2g provide information about whether these numbers represent disproportionality.[8] Column H is the *relative risk ratio* (RRR), the ratio of the *risk index* for African American students in this category to the *risk index* for all other students. Thus, for those corporations represented in Table 2g, Column H shows that African American students are anywhere from 1.6 to 6.06 times as likely as other students to be served in the disability category MiMD. As noted previously, a rule of thumb used in the present report for interpreting the *relative risk ratio* is that an RRR above 1.5 indicates that disproportionality may be present. Column I is the result of the test of statistical significance, *Chi-square*, associated with this degree of disproportionality, and Column J represents the direction of the disproportionality and the level of significance of the *Chi-square*. The final column shows that there is less than 1 chance in 100 (and often, less than 1 chance in 1,000) that this level of disproportionality would occur if no disproportionality actually were present.

Although in general, attention has been given both at the national and state levels to the *overrepresentation* of minority students in special education, in some cases we are more concerned with the *under-representation* of minority students. One area in which this is particularly true is for service in *Regular Class* settings. Table 2h shows corporations in which there was significant *under-representation* in service in the *Regular Class* for Hispanic students, using the same format as Table 2g.

This same procedure was repeated for all school corporations in the state of Indiana for all 15 disability categories and all 8 possible educational environments for the ethnic groups African American and Hispanic. The complete results may be found in Appendix A (Disability Categories) and Appendix B (Educational Environments). Note that the tables in Appendices A and B contain data only for those school corporations in which there was at least one student from the given ethnic group in the relevant disability category or setting. In addition, fewer than 10 students in a disability category or setting from the ethnic group under consideration can lead to instability of estimates. These cases may still raise concern (e.g., if there are only three African American students in a corporation and all three are labeled ED), but no statistical conclusions were drawn in cases where there were fewer than 10 students in a disability category or setting.

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[8] Readers interested in more information about the measures used and their calculation may consult Appendix C.

Table 2h. School Corporations with Statistically Significant Under-representation of Hispanic Students in Regular Class Placements, 2003-04 School Year

A Corporation Number	B School Corporation	C Total Students Served	D Total Hispanic Students Served	E Total Students Regular	F Hispanic Students Regular	G Risk Index[1]	H Relative Risk Ratio[2]	I Chi- Square	J Direction of Disprop. and Significance
2305	Elkhart	1840	140	708	39	0.28	0.71	7.22	Under p<.01
3315	Avon	856	21	605	10	0.48	0.67	5.52	Under p<.05
4615	Lake Central	1335	78	632	27	0.35	0.72	5.38	Under p<.05
5350	Pike	1674	78	752	24	0.31	0.67	6.62	Under p<.05
7865	Tippecanoe	1213	42	588	14	0.33	0.68	3.99	Under p<.05

[1] Proportion of the Hispanic student enrollment served in a *Regular Class* placement.

[2] Comparison of the *risk index* of African Americans to the risk for all other students.

Table 2i presents a summary of these analyses across all tables in Appendices A and B showing the number of school corporations in which there was significant disproportionality for each disability category or placement setting. A very different pattern of disproportionality emerges for African American and Hispanic students in the state of Indiana.

For African American students, Table 2i shows that disproportionality in disability categories is primarily an issue of overrepresentation in the categories *Mild Mental Disability* and *Emotional Disability*. There is clear under-representation in the category *Communication Disorder*, and some under-representation in *Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Interestingly, the category *Learning Disability* shows evidence of African American overrepresentation in some corporations, and under-representation in others. Thus, it is not surprising that, of the school corporations with disproportionality in overall special education service, 11 of 15 show overrepresentation. An even clearer picture emerges for service in the least restrictive environment for African American students. Where disproportionality occurs in educational environments, African American students are under-represented in *Regular Class* settings, and overrepresented in almost all other settings.

A different picture emerges for Hispanic students. Hispanic students are primarily under-represented in all disability categories for which there is disproportionality, particularly in the categories *Communication Disorder* and *Learning Disability*. Of the 13% of corporations that show disproportionality for Hispanic students in overall special education enrollment, 37 of 39 show under-representation. There appear to be fewer corporations in general that show disproportionality in educational environments for Hispanic than African American students.

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Again, the predominant pattern is one of under-representation, with the notable exception of *Resource Room*, in which four corporations show Hispanic overrepresentation and none show Hispanic under-representation.

Table 2i. Summary of School Corporations with Statistically Significant Disproportionality across Disability Categories and Placement, 2003-04 School Year

Disability Categories	# of School Corp. With Overrepresentation With Disproportionality				% of School Corp. with Overrepresentation With Disproportionality	
	African American Over*	Under**	Hispanic Over	Under	African American	Hispanic
ASD	0	5	0	1	1.64%	0.33%
CD	2	13	1	10	4.93%	3.62%
DB	0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
EDAO	3	1	0	0	1.32%	0.00%
EDFT	8	0	0	3	2.63%	0.99%
HI	0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
LD	8	4	1	12	3.95%	4.28%
MD	0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
MiMD	31	0	0	6	10.20%	1.97%
MoMD	4	0	0	1	1.32%	0.33%
OHI	0	1	0	0	0.33%	0.00%
OI	0	1	0	0	0.33%	0.00%
SMD	1	1	0	0	0.66%	0.00%
TBI	0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
VI	0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
Overall	11	4	2	37	4.93%	12.83%
Placement Type Settings						
Regular Class	0	18	1	5	5.92%	1.97%
Resource Room	10	0	4	0	3.29%	1.32%
Separate Class	9	0	1	1	2.96%	0.66%
Public Separate	2	0	0	0	0.66%	0.00%
Private Separate	0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
Public Residential	0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
Private Residential	1	1	0	0	0.66%	0.00%
Homebound/ Hospital	1	1	0	0	0.66%	0.00%

School Corporations with Evidence of Statistically Significant Disproportionality

Table 2j provides a summary of corporations in which significant disproportionality for African American students was found in one or more disability categories or educational environments.[9] The categories listed in Table 2j are those in which disproportionality was found to be most prevalent in the state: Overall Service, *Emotional Disability Full-Time, Learning Disability, CD, Mild Mental Disability, and Moderate Mental Disability, Regular Class, Resource Room,* and *Separate Class*. All school corporations with significantly disproportionate African American representation (denoted by an asterisk in that column) in any of these categories are presented in Table 2j. The first report on disproportionality in Indiana, for the 1998-99 school year, identified 37 out of 295 school corporations (12.5%) with significant African American disproportionality in special education in at least one of these categories. In the 2003-04 school year, 44 out of 304 school corporations (14.5%) showed evidence of disproportionality for African American students in at least one of these categories.[10]

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[9] A similar corporation-level analysis for Hispanic students was not done for this report, since Hispanic students were found to under-represented in almost all areas except in *Resource Room*. However, the data for Hispanic students by corporations for both disability categories and educational environments are available in Appendices A and B.

[10] Given the addition of two categories in this analysis that were not included in previous reports (*Learning Disabilities* and *Resource Room*), it is theoretically possible that the increase in the proportion of corporations with evidence of disproportionality is due to the addition of these categories. An inspection of Table 2j shows, however, that only one of the corporations listed in that table shows evidence of disproportionality *only* in a category added this year (Bartholomew, *Learning Disabilities*), suggesting that the increase in the number of districts showing evidence of disproportionality is not due simply to the addition of new categories.

Table 2j. Most Disproportionate School Corporations, 2003-04 School Year Summary, African American Students

School Corp. Number	School Corporation Name	OVERALL (over)	MIMH (over)	LD (over or under)	CD (under)	EHFT (over)	MOMH (over)	Regular Class (under)	Resource Class (over)	Separate Class (over)	Total # of Disproportionate Categories
5340	M S D Perry Township		*			*	*	*	*	*	6
235	Fort Wayne Community Schools	*	*			*	*	*			5
7205	South Bend Community Sch Corp		*		*	*		*		*	5
255	East Allen County Schools		*	* (over)	*			*	*		5
5400	School Town of Speedway	*	*	* (over)				*		*	5
4670	School City of East Chicago		*		*	*		*			4
7995	Evansville-Vanderburgh Sch Corp		*			*		*		*	4
2270	Concord Community Schools		*					*	*	*	4
2400	New Albany-Floyd Co Con Sch		*	* (over)				*	*		4
5310	Franklin Township Com Sch Corp	*	*	* (over)						*	4
5360	M S D Warren Township		*		*		*	*			4
125	M S D Southwest Allen County	*	*	* (over)				*	*		4
5375	M S D Wayne Township		*		*		*		*		4
7200	School City of Mishawaka	*	*			*		*			4
5350	M S D Pike Township		*			*		*			3
1010	Greater Clark County Schools		*		*				*		3
5370	M S D Washington Township		*			*			*		3
3500	Kokomo-Center Twp Con Sch Corp		*		*			*			3
5275	Anderson Community School Corp		*		*			*			3
2305	Elkhart Community Schools		*					*		*	3
3005	Hamilton Southeastern Schools		*	* (over)					*		3
4650	Lake Ridge Schools			* (under)				*		*	3
5385	Indianapolis Public Schools		*		*						2
4710	School City of Hammond		*		*						2
5300	M S D Decatur Township		*		*						2
4925	Michigan City Area Schools		*	* (under)							2
8030	Vigo County School Corp		*					*			2
8385	Richmond Community School Corp		*		*						2
4690	Gary Community School Corp	*	*								2
7855	Lafayette School Corporation		*	* (under)							2

School Corp. Number	School Corporation Name	OVERALL (over)	MIMH (over)	LD (over)	CD (under)	EHFT (over)	MOMH (over)	Regular Class (under)	Resource Class (over)	Separate Class (over)	Total # of Disproportionate Categories
6590	M S D Mount Vernon	*		* (over)							2
3490	Western School Corp	*							*		2
5330	M S D Lawrence Township		*								1
2865	Marion Community Schools		*								1
1970	Muncie Community Schools		*								1
4600	Merrillville Community School				*						1
365	Bartholomew Con School Corp			* (over)							1
3060	Carmel Clay							*			1
4700	Griffith Public Schools							*			1
6550	Portage Township Schools									*	1
875	Logansport Community Schools	*									1
3330	Plainfield Community Schools	*									1
5075	North Lawrence Community Schools	*									1
9310	Charter School of the Dunes										1
4600	Merrillville Community School			* (under)	*						2
365	Bartholomew Con School Corp			* (over)							1
3060	Carmel Clay							*			1
4700	Griffith Public Schools							*			1
6550	Portage Township Schools									*	1
875	Logansport Community Schools	*									1
3330	Plainfield Community Schools	*									1
5075	North Lawrence Community Schools	*									1
9310	Charter School of the Dunes										1

Summary

IDEA 97 requires state educational agencies (SEA's) to collect data on the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education classes. These analyses constitute a follow-up to previous descriptions (Skiba et al., 2000, 2001) of the extent of disproportionality in Indiana. The results indicate that ethnic disproportionality continues to be a concern in the state. Disproportionate representation is particularly evident for African American students in the disability categories *Emotional Disability* and *Mild Mental Disability.* There is also evidence of disproportionality for other minority students, especially American Indian students, in a number of disability categories. In terms of educational environments, there is evidence that African American students were under-represented in *Regular Class* placements, and overrepresented in all other more restrictive placements except *Resource Room.* Hispanic students were overrepresented in *Separate Class* settings. If anything, racial disparities in educational environments in the state of Indiana appear to be more pronounced than disparities in disability categories.

Since this is the third report analyzing ethnic disproportionality in special education in the state of Indiana, it is possible to begin to analyze trends across time. Unfortunately, disproportionality appears to be continuing to increase in the state. In a number of disability categories and educational environments, disproportionality of African American or Hispanic students increased from 1998-99 to 2003-04 at a rate greater than the growth in the share of population for those groups. Such data are reinforced by findings that the number of school corporations showing evidence of significant disproportionality in the state of Indiana increased from the 2000-01 school year to the 2003-04 school year.

This is the first year in which a corporation-level analysis of disproportionality for Hispanic students was conducted. In general, the results show a consistent pattern of *under-*representation in both disability categories and educational environments, with the only exceptions being overrepresentation in *Resource Room* placement. These results are somewhat inconsistent with some previous research that has found overrepresentation for Hispanic students. Analyzing data from 11 school districts in California, Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, and Higareda (2002) found overrepresentation of English-language learners in overall special education enrollment, mental retardation, and language and speech. The discrepancy between the

findings could well be due to the overall representation of Hispanic populations in the two states: while Hispanic students represented 42% of the student enrollment in the California districts, Hispanic students represent less than 5% of the student enrollment in Indiana. Whatever the reason for the discrepancy, this population represents the fastest growing ethnic group in the state of Indiana. Thus, it will be extremely important to continue to monitor Hispanic numbers in special education. Will those students continue to remain under-represented in special education, or will they become overrepresented as their share of the total enrollment increases? In addition, future analyses will need to focus on the meaning of Hispanic under-representation. Is under-representation in this case a positive sign, that Hispanic students are being referred at a lower rate because they are succeeding in the classroom? Or could these numbers be a sign that English-language learners are not getting services to which they are entitled? Future analyses will include a more intensive look at these issues.

TAKING ACTION: ADDRESSING ETHNIC DISPROPORTIONALITY THROUGH THE LOCAL EQUITY ACTION DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

As we have come to a better understanding of ethnic disproportionality in Indiana, educators in the state naturally begin to ask, "What can be done to address the problem locally?" In the last two years, some Indiana planning districts and school corporations have made significant progress towards addressing issues of ethnic disproportionality in special education, as well as more general equity issues for all their children. This chapter will describe systems change efforts in those districts that have come to be known as Local Equity Action Development (LEAD) projects. We present the LEAD Model framework and a brief summary of the LEAD projects in each of the eight participating districts.

What is Local Equity Action Development?

The Local Equity Action Development (LEAD) projects emerged as a result of conversations conducted with educators in seven school corporations on the context of disproportionality (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2003). After reviewing those findings, three of the participating planning districts volunteered to begin working to better understand and address issues of ethnic disproportionality in their district. The following year, following a statewide summit on disproportionality, five additional districts made a commitment to participate in the LEAD project.

The LEAD process, developed as a result of the collaboration of those districts with the Indiana Disproportionality Project, enables school personnel at the local level to make use of their own data and resources to better understand and address issues of disproportionality and equity. The model is based upon three assumptions:

- *All plans must be local, addressing local realities and local needs.* In order to address the complexity of disproportionality issues for culturally and linguistically diverse students in a way that is meaningful and appropriate to the culture of that district, plans must

originate from within the district. While IDP staff provide guidance and technical assistance, decisions on plan design and implementation are made by the district planning team.

- *Planning and evaluation must be based upon local data.* Local data on equity provide a framework that can motivate and guide local remediation efforts, and the success of any systems change efforts can be judged only by changes in those data.

- *Conversations about race, disproportionality, and equity are awkward and sometimes difficult, but necessary.* Part of the role of the team is to ensure that team meetings are a safe place for having honest and "courageous" conversations (see Chapter 6).

In the remainder of this chapter, we outline the steps of the LEAD process and provide examples of how that process has been implemented in the eight participating districts.

Moving Toward Equity: The Process of Local Equity Action Development

Table 3a provides a summary of the important questions and steps in the LEAD planning process. The boxes at the bottom of the table describe the steps that participating school corporations take to move from understanding to planning to implementation; ongoing questions in the top half of the table are designed to help LEAD teams identify the important tasks to be undertaken at each step. Specific descriptions of those phases follow. For a more detailed monthly outline of the LEAD process, please refer to Table 3b.

Forming the Planning Team

In the first phase, key leaders in the district form a preliminary planning team. This team typically includes the special education director, an administrative representative of general education, and other key district stakeholders.

During this phase, the team is guided by the following questions:

- What are our greatest areas of concern with respect to equity in our district?
- What practices and policies in our school or district may contribute to ethnic disproportionality in special education?
- Who are the additional key stakeholders in our school corporation(s) who need to be involved or represented in the planning process?

TABLE 3a. LOCAL EQUITY ACTION DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

ONGOING QUESTIONS
- What do we know about disproportionality in our district?
- What changes in school-based processes are perceived to have the greatest impact on disproportionality in our schools?
- How do we involve others in the process of creating ownership for and bringing about change?
- How will we know if our efforts are working?
- What impact will this have on other issues of equity?

PROCESS STEPS

Form Planning Team	Identify the Action of Greatest Potential Impact	Develop the Plan	Implement & Evaluate
Form a preliminary planning team	Hold focus groups to examine the issue and possible actions	Design a LEAD plan	
Review existing data	Examine and discuss input from the focus groups and other relevant data	Provide professional development, time, other supports	
Name the issue		Develop an Action Plan for Implementation	
Expand the planning team to include other key stakeholders	Gather research and information on best practices and models	Pilot in a few places	
Gather and analyze new information		Gather feedback	
	Engage in conversations on beliefs, assumptions, and expectations for ALL students and staff	Adapt the pilot	

Implement & Evaluate cycle:

Widen Implementation → Assess → Continue To Pilot → Continue to Adapt → Continue Conversations → Widen Implementation

Table 3b. Local Equity Action Development Suggested Timeline for Planning Year

AUGUST	Form Planning Team Decide upon area of interest Plan for focus groups Plan for data collection	***Planning team meets twice***
SEPTEMBER	Hold focus groups Explore area of interest Collect baseline data	***Planning team meets once***
OCTOBER	Analyze focus group data Share results of focus groups Continue to collect baseline data Explore area of interest Begin design of pilot	***Planning team meets twice***
NOVEMBER	Continue to explore area of interest Design pilot Plan for Implementation	***Planning team meets once or twice***
DECEMBER	Plan for implementation First steps of implementation in place	***Planning team meets once***
JANUARY	Implementation Begin collecting new data	***Planning team meets once***
FEBRUARY	Monitor implementation Adjust plan as necessary Continue collecting data	***Planning team meets twice***
MARCH	Continue monitoring pilot Continue collecting data Continue implementing Preliminary assessment of pilot Possible focus groups, interviews, other data	***Planning team meets once***
APRIL	Continue monitoring pilot Continue collecting data Continue implementing Adjust pilot	***Planning team meets twice***
MAY and JUNE	Assess pilot Analyze data Get feedback from participants Plan for next year	***Planning team meets once each month***

Example from the LEAD Projects. In Lawrence Township, the initial hypothesis of the planning team was that ethnic disproportionality was at least partly attributable to poor kindergarten readiness. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1994), research has shown that family participation and involvement improve students' learning. Thus the decision was made to work with a feeder pre-school and district kindergartens to increase family involvement and ensure parents were empowered to work with school personnel even before their child officially entered school. In order to work toward this initial goal, the planning team was expanded to include the pre-school education coordinator, and the kindergarten principal and assistant principals.

Identifying the Action of Greatest Potential Impact

Once the team has identified the areas of greatest concern, the expanded planning team identifies strategies, programs, or interventions that they believe are feasible, and will have the greatest probability of impact. In order to continue to better understand the nature of the issues, the planning team continues to look for opportunities to gather additional information. Many of the participating teams have found focus groups to be an excellent tool for a better understanding of current district beliefs, assumptions, and practices, and represent perspectives of a variety of constituent groups in the district. Some districts have also used surveys, disaggregated test data, and disciplinary referral data to better understand the types of strategies that best make a difference. The team also reviews best practices and current research during this phase for guidance on what others may be doing to address the issues that the team has identified.

In this phase, team actions are guided by consideration of the following questions:

- What actions, strategies, programs, or interventions do we believe would be most promising in addressing the potential causes of ethnic disproportionality we identified previously?
- What data do we need to collect and analyze? What have others done to address these types of issues?
- What impact do we expect that this course of action would have on ethnic disproportionality or equity in our district?

Example from the LEAD Projects. In Pike Township, the Planning Team decided to focus on the General Education Intervention process. Focus groups with representation from all GEI elementary school teams were held to determine the practices currently being used, strengths and weaknesses in the process as viewed at the school level, and ideas to restructure the process. In addition, IDP staff researched best practices in pre-referral intervention and the district began a collection of baseline data. A flexible template based on best practices which each school could then adapt was designed. Best practices to be adopted in that model included a case manager, regular meetings, advance preparation of paperwork, informing and inviting parents to meetings, and using a creative problem-solving approach to develop strategies (Whitten & Dieker, 1995).

Developing the Plan

In the third phase, the team pulls together all existing information from previous phases, such as results from the focus groups and district data, to design a pilot program and develop an action plan to implement that pilot. An effective plan should a) *be tailored to meet the needs and culture of the school corporation*, b) *reflect knowledge of best practice in special education*, and c) *identify data that will be used to assess whether the LEAD project is having an impact on the identified concerns*.

In this phase, the team works through the following questions:

- What support do we need (professional development, time, materials) to pilot our plan?
- How will we incorporate a focus on cultural competence into the plan?
- How will we know if the plan is being implemented?
- How will we know it is having an effect on ethnic disproportionality?
- How will we encourage ownership and involvement of an increasing number of district and school staff?

Example from the LEAD projects. Specifically, Perry Township identified five goals related to their pre-referral process and piloted the plan in two elementary schools. Each building established a diverse team of 5-7 members and trained the teams in

Creative Problem Solving (CPS) for GEI process. The GEI teams met weekly and supported referring teachers in using a variety of strategies. Each building used consistent and identical forms. The piloting schools then worked with the district planning team to adapt and modify the plan for implementation in all schools which will begin in the fall.

Implementing the Plan

A key principle guiding the implementation of LEAD projects is the principle of "small wins" (Weick, 1984). Rather than beginning with grand plans that may be difficult or impossible to implement successfully, it is better to implement the pilot in a small number of schools. During the pilot implementation, the team gathers feedback and adapts the model as necessary before considering implementation in a larger number of school sites. Assessment and adaptation are ongoing. The team, which may be reconfigured as an implementation team, continues conversations to ensure that the intent of the LEAD project—the remediation of ethnic disproportionality—is being addressed.

In this phase, the team makes sure it is answering the following questions:

- How will we incorporate feedback from those engaged in implementation and data collection into the plan?
- How will we share the information on the LEAD project with others in our district?
- How will we expand participation and ownership in the plan?
- How will we continue to adapt and evaluate the effects of the project?
- How will we ensure that the project is addressing the original question of concern, ethnic disproportionality?

Example from the LEAD Projects. In Franklin Township, the planning team researched approaches to the pre-referral intervention process. Focus groups with representation from the three participating schools were held to gain insight into the processes currently in place and explore possibilities for change. Focus groups also responded to questions addressing cultural competency. Training in diversity was held at all schools and data on ethnic disproportionality were incorporated into the training.

After researching best practices and two models of pre-referral approaches, a meeting was held with representative teachers, counselors, and administrators from all three pilot schools to share the information and explore options. Each school team discussed the possible approaches to the GEI referral and came to agreement on pursuing the Creative Problem Solving model, into which the district would incorporate an "issues based" meeting in addition to the meetings addressing individual students. The planning team then expanded to include representatives from all schools planning to implement in the fall. All schools collected data this year to use as a baseline for the implementation year.

Leadership in Addressing Disproportionality: Participating LEAD Projects

First Round Districts

Three districts initiated LEAD projects in the fall of 2002. All three districts developed LEAD Project plans; two of the districts continued to participate in the project for a second year and are currently implementing their LEAD Project Plans.

MSD of Lawrence Township

Lawrence began its LEAD initiative with a focus on Family Involvement at the early childhood level. The planning team believed that school readiness and communication with parents were contributing factors to ethnic disproportionality. As a result of focus groups and site visits to early childhood programs in Chicago, the team began planning the development of a Centralized Kindergarten Family Support Team and hired a family liaison specialist in the 2003-04 year.

The LEAD project in Lawrence has developed into a multifaceted approach including:

- Involvement with the Community Task Force on the Achievement Gap
- Facilitation of professional development for elementary school principals in cultural competency
- Work with two of the elementary schools to develop schoolwide initiatives to address disproportionality and the achievement gap
- Ongoing contact with administrative leaders in Lawrence Township and continued advising of the Family Involvement initiative

In the third year of implementation, Lawrence will look to consolidate its initiatives for Family Involvement through a district action research team and continue Cultural Competency work with principals and assistant principals.

MSD of Pike Township.
Pike was the first district to concentrate efforts on the pre-referral process. The planning team worked to develop a flexible template, including common forms and best practices. This template would be adapted by each elementary school to best suit the needs of that school. The first year was spent researching and developing a best practices approach to GEI along with supporting forms and data collection. This year, 2003/04, the GEI template has been implemented in all elementary schools. During the third year, Pike will refine the flexible template, improve data collection, increase district and school ownership, and work to ensure implementation integrity of the plan.

Indianapolis Public Schools.
The LEAD team in the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) elected to implement an instruction-centered approach based on a peer coaching model. Focus groups held at the participating schools stated that they had sufficient background in instructional approaches but needed support in implementing differentiated instruction and classroom management techniques and that this support would best come from peers. Teams of teachers were formed and a workshop on peer observation and peer coaching techniques was held. At this point in the process, in the IPS pilot schools the LEAD Project plan has been developed but not yet implemented.

Second Round Districts

Rise Special Services Planning District

Three townships under the RISE planning district, Decatur, Franklin, and Perry, are restructuring their current General Education Intervention (GEI) teams. The goal of each district is to use the GEI teams more efficiently and thereby address issues of ethnic disproportionality in their districts.

> *Decatur Township.* Decatur Township is restructuring their current General Education Intervention (GEI) team in all of the seven schools within the district, including elementary, middle, and high schools. The project is developing a more individualized and systematic approach to the GEI. A number of changes to the GEI process are planned, including protocols for the GEI Team Meeting, and a set of forms that reflects the process and promotes better communication and transfer of students between schools. In addition, each school has indicated that diversity training is necessary to promote cultural awareness and competency when addressing ethnic disproportionality.

Franklin Township. Each school-based GEI team has been renamed SOS (Supporting Our Students) and will be trained in the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) Approach by the Blumberg Institute. The corporation will adapt the CPS process so that each GEI meeting includes an "issues" based topic in addition to a consideration of individual student issues. The goal of the SOS team is to give teachers a broader "toolbox" of research-based strategies to implement in their classrooms in order to meet the diverse needs of all learners. Thus the team will serve to advise individual teachers, as well as address broader based school issues that affect many students. Each of the schools in the corporation also participated in a cultural competency professional development program. Implementation of CPS will take place in all elementary as well as intermediate school in the fall.

Perry Township. Perry Township is establishing a more consistent and organized General Education Intervention (GEI) team. Two elementary schools began working with the planning team and have since established a GEI team that meets on a weekly basis. Structured forms for the GEI meetings have been created and are in use in each school. Resource manuals on specific classroom and instructional strategies have been created for use in each building. Additionally, a preliminary training on issues related to diversity was offered at both schools in February and a more intense training is being scheduled for the summer. Plans for next year include training in the CPS process for all elementary schools and the district's two middle schools.

Fort Wayne Community Schools

Fort Wayne is implementing an instruction-based Initiative that focuses on early grades (K-2) literacy instruction to meet the needs of at-risk children. The goals are to reduce behavior problems, raise achievement, lower referrals to special education, form closer relationships with students by decreasing the student to adult ratio, and provide extra opportunities for individual support. Teachers trained in the balanced literacy approach used by the district are placed in classrooms to work with interchangeable small groups of students in collaboration with the classroom teachers.

Hammond

Hammond is in the planning phase of the LEAD project: selecting target schools to pilot a restructuring of the GEI process and working on changing their data collection efforts related to GEI at the school level. The Hammond LEAD team is planning to streamline their data collection process and collect additional pieces of data specific to their questions/concerns.

Understanding Best Practice in Equity Action: IDP Technical Assistance Efforts

In order to support positive change, IDP has developed "Resource Responses" for schools which utilize research-based practices. For example, in Franklin Township, a common concern arising throughout the schools was grade retention. IDP staff performed a literature review of alternatives to grade retention and the information was then compiled into a brief summary of best practices and alternatives to retention. They also offered additional resources and links to websites related to the response topic. The response was disseminated to principals and teachers in Franklin Township. Other topics developed as Resource Responses so far include:

- Peer coaching,
- Inclusion,
- Early literacy interventions,
- Math instruction, and
- Differentiated instruction.

In the coming year, the information will be shared with participating districts by way of a formatted set of fact sheets to be disseminated as a part of a training manual for districts addressing issues of ethnic disproportionality. In addition, each fact sheet will be available online. These responses will be available on the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy website at www.ceep.indiana.edu.

What We Have Learned

The LEAD model recognizes the need for local districts and schools to take ownership of the process while being provided the support necessary to do so. As districts and schools take ownership of ethnic disproportionality issues, the understanding of the complexity of ethnic disproportionality and its interrelatedness to discipline, achievement, and the necessity to be linked with other school initiatives becomes more apparent.

- **General/special education collaboration.** Disproportionality in special education is not simply a problem for special education, but a sign that equity may need to be addressed in multiple systems across both general and special education. In order to address ethnic disproportionality then, collaboration between special education and general education is essential. One district administrator recently stated, "The LEAD initiative has done more in one year to do away with the wall between special education and general education than anything else in my experience."

- **Conversations about equity and race are key**. In order to create change that will result in greater equity we must examine the beliefs we hold about inequity and be willing to honestly explore the causes of inequity. In so doing, it may well be necessary to question the pattern of assumptions we hold about race and privilege (McIntosh, 1990). (See Chapter 6 for an in depth discussion.)

- **Using data is essential**. When a school system is willing to ask itself about the expectations it holds for children, it begins to bring accountability for equity inside the district (Olsen, 1997).

- **Developing a sense of ownership is a complex process.** The process is facilitated by understanding the issues, conversation with colleagues, and direct involvement in developing and implementing a plan to address it and assess it.

- **Addressing issues of equity must be linked with other district initiatives**. In order for remediation of ethnic disproportionality to be ongoing, schools and corporations must integrate the LEAD plan with other building- and corporation- wide initiatives such as school improvement plans.

Next Steps

The LEAD Projects will continue to work with local districts to fine tune the process developed over the past two years. In the coming year, additional districts will begin to implement the lead model and additional training and materials will become available. Districts that may be interested in participating in the LEAD projects in any capacity should contact the Indiana Disproportionality Project.

HOW DO WE MEASURE CHANGE?
THE REFERRAL TO ELIGIBILITY RATIO

In any change process, evaluation is essential. Administrators, teachers, and parents want to know whether the effort put into change is truly making a difference. This chapter describes an approach to tracking change in disproportionality that is currently being piloted in some Indiana corporations. The description, rationale, and pilot use of the measure are described below.

The Referral to Eligibility Ratio

The Referral to Eligibility Ratio is a measure that grew out of discussions held with the Indiana Disproportionality Project Advisory Board in May and October of 2003. Members of the Advisory Board suggested that it should be possible to identify effective pre-referral intervention teams through the increased efficiency of their referral process. When the pre-referral or GEI process is operating as intended, the majority of students will be served effectively through the pre-referral intervention process, resulting in fewer referrals made to assess eligibility for special education services. In those cases where a referral does result in testing, it should be more accurate: that is, a higher percentage of children who are referred for testing will be found eligible, since the pre-referral system will have eliminated inappropriate referrals.

The Referral to Eligibility measure tracks the three steps of the pre-referral intervention and referral process: 1) referral to the pre-referral intervention process, 2) referral from the pre-referral intervention process to assessment for special education eligibility (or directly to assessment in those cases where the pre-referral process is waived), and 3) special education eligibility outcome.[11] To use the measure, schools enter the number of students at each step into a spreadsheet, enabling calculation of these

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[11] We will use the term "pre-referral" to identify those students that are served by interventions developed by the pre-referral intervention team. The term "referral" will be used to identify those students who could not be served effectively through pre-referral interventions, and consequently were referred on to assessment for eligibility for special education services and then referred or not referred to special education.

ratios. The data are also disaggregated by race, allowing identification of the stage or stages, if any, of the process that make the largest contribution to disproportionality.

How Would Such a Measure be Useful?

How Do We Know the Pre-referral Process is Working?

The use of pre-referral intervention teams has increased substantially and is currently mandated in many states (Carter & Sugai, 1989). Despite their increasing popularity, there has been little research regarding the effectiveness of pre-referral intervention teams (Meyers, Valentino, Meyers, Boretti, & Brent, 1996). Uneven findings in regard to effectiveness may be partially accounted for by inconsistent implementation in pre-referral practices within and across states (Buck, Polloway, Smith-Thomas, & Cook, 2003).

As noted in Chapter 3, a number of districts seeking to address issues of ethnic disproportionality have chosen the pre-referral intervention process (or GEI) as a focus of their remediation efforts. The Referral to Eligibility Ratio will allow those districts to analyze whether the changes they are putting in place improve the efficiency of the process. Research has found that high percentages of students who are referred to pre-referral intervention teams are also tested (90-92%) and that typical referral/placement rates are also very high (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, & Christenson, 1983; Ysseldyke, Vanderwood, & Shriner, 1992). Comparing baseline ratios with those calculated after the implementation of improvements will enable planning districts to assess whether changes in the pre-referral intervention process have resulted in more accurate identification of students who are eligible for special education services and a reduction of the number of students who are tested for eligibility to receive special education services.

Tracking Disproportionality

The Referral to Eligibility Ratio allows for an examination of disproportionality throughout the stages of the eligibility determination process itself: 1) referral to the pre-referral intervention process, 2) referral to testing for special education eligibility, and 3) special education eligibility decisions. These data provide information on whether or not

disproportionality is occurring at one step, two steps, or all steps of the process. Examining the data for disproportionality will determine if all groups are being served equally throughout the Referral to Eligibility process.

A More Sensitive Measure of Change

As described in Chapter 2, Indiana is moving toward the risk ratio as a way of determining the presence and degree of ethnic disproportionality at the corporation level. Yet, although such a measure is valuable in identifying whether a problem exists, it may not be sensitive enough for monitoring yearly changes that take place as a result of reform efforts.

It is likely that a change in disproportionality figures at the corporation level may take an extended period of time, perhaps years. Even if a district-wide intervention succeeded in reducing the disproportionality in special education placements in a given year, it may have little impact on the overall disproportionality rate reflecting racial imbalances among students that are already being served in special education within that district. Therefore, the Referral to Eligibility measure is a more precise yearly measure that will allow individual schools and corporations to evaluate the effects of changes that take place in the short term (e.g., within a single year).

Uses of the Referral to Eligibility Ratio

Efficiency of the Pre-referral Intervention Process

The pre-referral intervention process is designed to develop interventions for students that are having any type of difficulty (e.g., academic, behavioral, social) within the classroom. If the pre-referral process is functioning as intended, the majority of children will be served effectively through the interventions generated by the pre-referral intervention team; it is possible that only a small percentage of children would be passed on to assessment for eligibility for special education services. Therefore, an efficient pre-referral intervention process would show: 1) a high percentage of students utilizing the pre-referral intervention process, 2) a low percentage of students entering the process who are assessed for eligibility for special education services, and 3) a high percentage of

those students who are assessed qualifying for special education services. Table 4a illustrates two hypothetical corporations, Corporation I and Corporation II, which use their pre-referral intervention teams differently. (It is important to note that these are hypothetical districts and the data generated for them have been set at fairly extreme levels for purposes of illustration.)

Table 4a. Hypothetical Corporation Data Illustrating Referral to Eligibility Ratio

(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)
Corporation I	Total Referrals	# Referred to General Education Intervention Team (GEI)	# Referred to Testing	Referral to Test %[a]	# Eligible for Special Education	Test-Elig %[b]	Total Enroll
Total	100	90	40	40%	30	75%	200
Corporation II	Total Referrals	# Referred to General Education Intervention Team (GEI)	# Referred to Testing	Referral to Test %	# Eligible for Special Education	Test-Elig %	Total Enroll
Total	100	20	90	90%	45	50%	200

[a.] The Referral to Testing Ratio (Referral to Test %) represents the proportion of those students referred to special education who are assessed for eligibility for special education services..

[b.] The Testing to Eligibility Ratio (Test-Elig %) represents the proportion of those students assessed for special education services who are found eligible.

Corporation I has an active pre-referral intervention process that they call General Education Intervention (GEI) in which team members have been trained to provide meaningful intervention suggestions to classroom teachers. Teachers and staff view the pre-referral intervention process as a useful tool, and as a result, the majority of referrals utilize the pre-referral intervention team. As can be seen from Column D of Table 4a, less than half of all referrals to special education result in testing for eligibility. Thus, the Referral to Testing Percentage (Column E) is 40%. Furthermore, because the pre-referral intervention team has "weeded out" those referrals that probably would not qualify for special education, the proportion of those referrals tested who qualify for special education services is higher. In Corporation I, 30 out of 40 students who are tested are

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found eligible for special education services, for a Testing to Eligibility Percentage of 75% (Column G).

In contrast, Corporation II has a fairly inactive pre-referral intervention process. Teachers and school staff generally do not view the GEI process as helpful, and as a result, less than a quarter of all referred students are served through the pre-referral GEI process. Because the pre-referral intervention process is fairly inactive, a large number of students go on to be tested for eligibility for special education. Thus, the Referral to Testing Percentage (Column E) is 90%. In Corporation II, only 45 out of the 90 students who go on to testing are found eligible for special education services, for a Testing to Eligibility Percentage of 50% (Column G).

In summary, then, in a corporation with an active pre-referral intervention team providing sufficient assistance to teachers so that only the most appropriate referrals go on to assessment, we would expect to see a) a lower percentage of referred students being tested, and b) a higher percentage of those students who are tested being found eligible for special education services. The use of pre-referral intervention may, as in this case, cause a moderate reduction in the overall numbers of students eligible for special education. Just as important, however, by increasing the efficiency of the process, it makes it more likely that the appropriate students will be served in special education.

Tracking Disproportionality with the Referral to Eligibility Ratio

As mentioned above, the Referral to Eligibility measure allows for an examination of disproportionality throughout the stages of the eligibility determination process itself: 1) referral to the pre-referral intervention process, 2) referral to testing for special education eligibility, and 3) special education eligibility decisions. These data provide information on whether or not disproportionality is occurring at one step, two steps, or at all steps of the Referral to Eligibility process. For example, a high level of disparity in number of referrals between White and African American students would suggest that the problem of disproportionality originates at the level of referrals to special education by classroom teachers. In contrast, a finding that greater numbers of African American than White students who were tested were found eligible could be evidence of some type of bias present among testers or tests. Obviously, the interventions that a

district would choose to address disproportionality would differ considerably depending on where in the process disproportionality was identified.

A More Sensitive Measure of Change

In addition to providing information on ethnic disproportionality throughout the three stages of the pre-referral and referral processes, the Referral to Eligibility ratio will allow individual schools and corporations to more precisely evaluate the effects that changes in the pre-referral process have on ethnic disproportionality in the near term (e.g., within a single year). Because of the pre-existing racial imbalances, changes in overall disproportionality are unlikely to be seen in broad measures in the short term. Even if a highly effective program is put into place in a given year, measures of overall disproportionality are unlikely to show substantial change, since students who were identified for special education services in previous years are included in those overall statistics. Therefore, it is valuable to track changes in data that occur within a given year by examining disproportionality data for those students who are newly identified for special education services. As districts and schools move to address disproportionality, such a short-term measure will become increasingly important to demonstrate both to policymakers and to local district stakeholders, that interventions being put in place locally are indeed having an effect.

Summary

The Referral to Eligibility Ratio is a measure that is intended as a way to track ethnic disproportionality and the overall effectiveness of the pre-referral intervention and referral process. The measure allows for corporations and schools to: 1) assess whether efforts to improve the pre-referral intervention process are truly making a difference, 2) examine if disproportionality is occurring throughout the stages of the eligibility determination process itself, and 3) evaluate the effects of changes that take place in the short term on ethnic disproportionality (e.g., within a single year). In summary, then, the Referral to Eligibility Ratio can provide useful information to educators about the effectiveness and equity of the special education referral process.

Future Directions

Indiana corporations working with the Indiana Disproportionality Project (IDP) on ethnic disproportionality have reported that they find the concept of the ratios to be quite useful. IDP staff is currently working on the development of a software tool that will calculate schools' changes in overall disproportionality figures, measurement of pre-referral intervention team effectiveness, and disproportionality within the pre-referral and referral process. Participating corporations will continue to work with the project to refine the approach in order to ensure its practicality in school settings.

EXAMINING OUR ASSUMPTIONS:

FACTORS THAT DO AND DO NOT CONTRIBUTE TO DISPROPORTIONALITY

Disproportionate representation of ethnic students, especially African Americans, has been among the most longstanding and intransigent issues in the field of special education. Four years of study here in Indiana have taught us that the causes of racial disparities in special education service are complex. One must assume, therefore, that there are no easy answers: addressing and eventually remediating disproportionality will require attention, and a commitment of personal and perhaps even scarce fiscal resources.

Yet the inadequacy of resources is not the sole barrier to addressing civil rights concerns. Resources put toward a goal are better directed if there is a shared commitment to achieving that goal and a clear understanding of the problem. On the other hand, if our assumptions about the factors that cause and maintain disproportionality are incorrect, it is possible that energy and resources will be expended in the wrong direction, leaving us no closer to our ultimate goals.

In this chapter, we summarize two research reports that sought to address underlying assumptions that are often made about the causes of ethnic disproportionality. These summaries address two questions:

- *To what extent can ethnic disproportionality in special education be explained by poverty and other demographic characteristics?*
- *Is minority overrepresentation in more restrictive settings a function of the fact that minority students are represented more often in disability categories (e.g., Emotional Disability) that tend to be served in more restrictive placements?*

Study I. To What Extent Can Poverty Explain Disproportionality?[12]

The continuing fact of ethnic disproportionality in special education clearly causes us to seek explanations. One of the most common rationales offered is that, since many minority students live in poverty, what we perceive as racial disparities in special education are in fact due to the effects of poverty. We conducted a statistical test of this hypothesis, exploring the question: To what extent does poverty explain ethnic disproportionality in special education?

Is Disproportionality Really Due to the Influences of Poverty?

Many researchers and educators concerned about inequities in education often point to poverty as a key explanatory variable. The disproportionate numbers of African American and Hispanic students living in poverty lead many to the conclusion that observed race-based differences in education are the results of educational disadvantage caused by impoverished environments. As stated by one special education director in Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, and Wu (2003), "I am not sure that what we say is disproportionality of race is not more disproportionality based on poverty." Some researchers share that perspective. MacMillan and Reschly (1998) argue that the statistical fact of racial disparities in special education may be simply artificial, caused primarily by the fact that many students of color are also affected by the disadvantages caused by poverty.

There is no doubt that the highly negative effects of poverty leave many students exposed to environmental stressors and less "ready" for school. Since minority students are disproportionately exposed to impoverished environments, it seems likely that poverty contributes to the disproportionality of minority students in special education. What is unclear is the magnitude of this influence, especially when considered concurrently with other influencing variables.

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[12] For more complete information about any aspect of this study, the complete report can be located online at ceep.indiana.edu/**XXXX**. The full citation for the report is Skiba, R., Poloni-Staudinger, L., Simmons, A. B., Feggins, L. R., & Chung, C.G. (in press). Unproven causal links: The inadequacy of poverty as an explanation for minority disproportionality in special education. *Journal of Special Education.*

Considering Race and Poverty Together: A Statistical Analysis

In order to explore the commonly held perception that poverty is a key factor in ethnic disproportionality, we investigated the contribution of poverty in comparison to other variables to the likelihood of special education identification, as well as the occurrence of ethnic disproportionality in special education. The study attempted to answer two primary questions:

- *To what extent does poverty, along with other explanatory variables (i.e., racial classification, district resources, and academic/behavioral measures), predict ethnic disproportionality[13] in special education?*
- *How do racial classification and poverty interact in the prediction of disproportionality?*

Question #1: What Predicts Ethnic Disproportionality?

Using a regression model, poverty, school and learning environment resources, and academic and behavioral outcomes [14] were entered to test their relative strength in predicting disproportionality. This enabled us to determine the extent to which poverty predicted corporation disproportionality overall and in specific disability categories (i.e., *Mild Mental Disability* [MiMD], *Moderate Mental Disability* [MoMD], *Learning Disabled* [LD], *Emotional Disability* [ED], and *Communication Disorder* [CD]).

In general, poverty proved to be a weak and inconsistent predictor of disproportionality. When race and other demographic variables were controlled, poverty did *not* predict overall levels of corporation disproportionality, nor was there *any* significant relationship between poverty and the extent of disproportionality in the categories of ED or MoMD. Moreover, a corporation's poverty rate predicted disproportionality in LD and CD in the opposite direction to what was expected: poorer

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[13] Disproportionality in this study refers to African American disproportionality only, due to the low numbers of disabled students in other non-White racial groups, as well as the persistent and intractable disproportionate identification of African American students nationwide.

[14] Poverty was measured by a school corporation's percentage of children eligible for free lunch. School and learning environment resources were measured by the corporation's average teacher salary, student to teacher ratio, expenditures per student, percent of African American students, and corporation size. Academic and behavioral outcomes were measured by the corporation's third grade state accountability test scores (ISTEP), average SAT scores controlling for the number of students taking the test; and suspension, expulsion, and dropout rates.

districts had *lower* levels of disproportionality for these disability categories. In only one disability category, MiMD, did districts with higher rates of poverty also have higher levels of disproportionality. In sum, the contribution made by poverty to explaining ethnic disproportionality was found to be highly inconsistent and sometimes operating in a direction opposite to that expected (e.g., lower poverty districts showed higher rates of disproportionality in LD and CD).

Unexpectedly, the most consistent predictor of ethnic disproportionality in this analysis was a corporation's suspension/expulsion rate. Corporation rates of suspension and expulsion significantly and positively predicted ethnic disproportionality in the categories of ED, MiMD, MoMD, and LD. These findings indicate that a relationship exists between school discipline and racial disparities in special education, but further research will be necessary to explore the meaning of this relationship.

Question #2: How Do Race and Poverty Interact in Predicting Disproportionality?

In order to more clearly understand the interaction of race and poverty, we used a logistic regression analysis to explore the likelihood of special education identification at three economic levels: low income—70% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch; mid-level income—30% free or reduced lunch; and high income—0% free or reduced lunch. At all three economic levels, African American students are more likely than their peers to be disproportionately identified for special education services. Thus, irrespective of a school corporation's economic status, African American students have a higher likelihood of being identified as disabled compared to their peers.

We also found that the gap between African American students and their peers *widens* as poverty increases. Stated differently, although disproportionality exists in both rich and poor districts, the Black-White gap widens as one moves from wealthy to lower-income school districts. Thus, although it does not determine or explain disproportionality, poverty does appear to magnify the gap between African American students and their peers in special education identification.

Conclusions

These results show that poverty does influence identification in special education, but it does not explain ethnic disproportionality in special education. In only one disability category did poverty positively predict ethnic disproportionality; in others it predicted in a direction opposite to that expected (e.g., wealthier districts showed greater disproportionality in LD and CD). In all cases, poverty was not a particularly strong predictor compared to other variables. Instead, a corporation's suspension and expulsion rates consistently and positively predicted disproportionality. Finally, follow-up analyses showed that, where poverty has an influence on special education disproportionality, it magnifies already existing racial differences in special education identification.

In summary, statistical analysis reveals that our intuitions about race and poverty may not be entirely accurate. Although poverty clearly does contribute to rates of eligibility for special education, it does not fully explain racial disparities in special education.

Study II. How Do We Explain African American Disproportionality in the Least Restrictive Environment?

Placement of Students with Disabilities

Ethnic disproportionality in special education disability categories has been documented consistently since the late 1960s (Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Dunn, 1968; Finn, 1982; Hosp & Reschly, 2003; Losen & Orfield, 2002; National Research Council, 2002). Less attention, however, has been focused on racial imbalances in placement settings for students with disabilities.

The rate of growth of inclusion for students with disabilities over the past 15 years has been dramatic. In 1999-2000, approximately 96% of students with disabilities were served in regular school buildings and of those, 47.3% were served outside of the *Regular Class* for less than 21% of the school day (McLeskey, Henry, & Axelrod, 1999). Students with disabilities benefit from inclusion in a number of ways, including completion of more assignments (National Center for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995), gains in reading performance and academic functioning (Carlson & Parshall, 1996;

Marston, 1996; Shinn, Powell-Smith, Good, & Baker, 1997), and self-esteem, social interaction skills, and language development (Lewis, 1994). Although some still express concerns about the extent to which inclusion has fulfilled its promise in practice (Kavale, 2000), the opportunity for students with disabilities to be educated in increasingly less restrictive environments with non-disabled peers has become widely accepted as a consensual social value and a part of special education law.

Is African American Disproportionality in Placement a Function of Disability Category?

Despite the explicit policy intent, students of color—African Americans in particular—remain overrepresented in more restrictive learning environments. One possible explanation for this finding is that African Americans are disproportionately identified in disability categories that tend to be served in more restrictive instructional settings. The *24th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* suggests, for example, that "it is possible that the differences in placement by race/ethnicity may reflect the disproportional representation of some minority groups in disability categories that are predominately served in more restrictive settings" (OSEP, 2002, p. III-45).

We conducted a set of analyses to test this question: Is African American disproportionality in special education placement in the state of Indiana a function of overrepresentation in certain disability categories, or is it independent of disability category?

Considering Placement by Race and Disability Category: A Statistical Comparison

We drew category and placement information for individual students with disabilities enrolled in the state's 295 school corporations from a database maintained by the Indiana Department of Education Division of Exceptional Learners as part of its reporting requirements for IDEA 97, and classified each student in the database as African American or Other. We merged the statewide CODA data with statewide enrollment data disaggregated by race/ethnicity and assessed whether disproportionality

existed within disability categories and placement settings. Specifically, we looked at the prevalence of placement in either *Regular Class* placement (removal from general education classroom less than 21% of the school day) or *Separate Class* placement (removal from general education classroom greater than 60% of the school day) within five disability categories (*Emotional Disability, Mild Mental Disability, Moderate Mental Disability, Learning Disability, Communication Disorder*). Together then, we examined the extent of disproportionality in each of 10 disability-placement dyads (five disability categories x 2 placement settings).

We analyzed the available data using the three measures of disproportionality (composition index, risk index, and relative risk ratio) described in Chapter 2. As noted in Chapter 2, African Americans are under-represented in regular classroom settings and overrepresented in *Separate Class* settings (.62 times as likely to be placed in regular classroom settings and nearly three times as likely to be placed in more restrictive placement settings). Statistical tests suggest that these differences are very unlikely to have occurred by chance alone.

Is Disproportionality in Less Restrictive Placements Due to Disproportionality in Disability Category?

The fact of overrepresentation of African Americans in *Separate Class* settings does not in and of itself answer the question of why such disproportionality exists. It could well be that the overrepresentation of African American students in restrictive settings is due primarily to their disproportionate placement in disability categories that tend to be served more often outside of the general classroom. We examined this question by looking at whether there was disproportionate representation in placement *within* disability categories. If, for example, African American students are served in more restrictive settings at the same rate as other students with emotional disabilities, we conclude that disproportionality in LRE is due to minority overrepresentation in the category *Emotional Disability*. If, on the other hand, minority students with *Emotional Disability* are more likely to be in *Separate Classes* than other students with ED, we conclude that disproportionality in placement settings is not due simply to disproportionality in that category.

The results showed that, in 7 out of the 10 disability-placement dyads examined, African American students were more likely to be served in more restrictive class settings than their peers with the same disability, and less likely than their peers with the same disability to be served in less restrictive class settings. In ED and MiMD, categories historically associated with the highest rates of disproportionality, African Americans were consistently under-represented in the less restrictive settings and overrepresented in more restrictive settings. In the category ED, African Americans were .55 times as likely to be placed in regular classroom settings as other students with *Emotional Disabilities*, but about 1.2 times as likely as their peers with ED to be placed in *Separate Class* settings. Among children identified as MiMD, African Americans were 1.5 times as likely to be placed in *Separate Classes*, and .80 times as likely to be served in regular classrooms as their similarly-disabled peers. Again, it is highly unlikely that differences of this magnitude would have occurred by chance alone.

African American students with disabilities were also overrepresented in disability categories typically served in less restrictive settings. African American students with *Learning Disabilities* were over three times as likely as their peers with similar disabilities to be served in *Separate Classes*, and .70 times as likely as their peers to be served in *Regular Classes*. In the *Communication Disorder* category, where students in this state are overwhelmingly served in general education settings, African Americans were over seven times as likely as other students to be served in separate settings, although no under-representation was found in *Regular Class* settings among African Americans with this disability.[15]

Conclusions

Monitoring of ethnic disproportionality in Indiana has found consistent evidence of overrepresentation of African American students in *Separate Class* settings, and under-representation in general classroom settings. These findings mirror disparities found at the national level (OSEP, 2002). Given the extent to which service in less

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[15] The magnitude of this result should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of African American students identified with a *Communication Disorder*.

restrictive settings has become a key goal of special education, the lower level of access to general education among minority students is a serious concern.

Some have suggested that this disproportionality in LRE placement is due to the disproportionate identification of minority students in disability categories that tend to yield more restrictive placements. This analysis of disproportionality in placement *within* disability category did not find this to be the case, however. Rather, in almost all disability categories, African American children were more likely than their peers with the same disability to be placed in more restrictive settings, and less likely than their peers with the same disability to be placed in less restrictive settings. Indeed, the greatest disproportionality in placement appeared in the categories *Learning Disabilities* and *Communication Disorders* that are, in general, likely to yield *less* restrictive placement.

While these findings rule out one explanation of racial disparity in special education placements, they do not in and of themselves explain why African American students are placed in more restrictive settings. Previous research has suggested certain processes that may contribute to disproportionality. It has been suggested that a need for a more relational learning style may disadvantage African American students in classrooms that emphasize more individualistic learning structures (Townsend, 2000). In one study of racial disparities in placement, African American students who received less individual teacher attention as a pre-referral intervention ended up spending more time outside the regular classroom setting (Hosp & Hosp, 2002). Another hypothesis has suggested that teachers may interpret certain African American behaviors as threatening or confrontational (Hosp & Hosp, 2002; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Townsend, 2000). Here in Indiana, we have found that the causes of disproportionality are, in general, highly complex (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2003) and may have to do with the level of resources available for addressing student needs in the general education classroom.

More study is needed to determine the extent to which these findings are consistent across time in this and other states. But given the social consensus for education in the least restrictive environment, the reduced opportunity for African American students to benefit from education in the least restrictive settings remains a critical concern in Indiana and the nation.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS: THE BLACK-WHITE PERSPECTIVE GAP

Few topics generate more intense debate than the issue of race in America. On the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, it is clear that our country has made considerable progress in expanding the opportunities available to people of color. Despite progress since *Brown*, however, the gap in educational opportunities between White and Black remains very real. These continued institutional inequities remain a source of frustration and anger in the Black community, yet are often unrecognized in the White community. In this chapter, we explore a difficult issue: differences in perspective on issues of race and equity among individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Why is it so difficult to talk about race? What do we do about that?

A Different Kind of Gap

Segregation and discrimination are no longer explicitly supported at any level of government, but the official end of segregation has not fully resolved issues of injustice and inequity in our country. Researchers continue to document wide and continuing inequities in the field of education in areas such as school discipline, tracking (e.g., college preparatory vs. vocational coursework), rates of referral to special education, quality of resources, and access to highly trained teachers.

As the Indiana Disproportionality Project has explored the manifestations of that gap in special education referral and placement practices and rates, it has led us to become aware of another gap—a very real and fundamental difference in how White and Black Americans perceive and talk about the topic of race. Perhaps no recent issue exemplified this better than reactions to the O. J. Simpson verdict. When the not guilty verdict was announced, television cameras captured a wide gulf between the excitement and cheering among African Americans and the disbelief and even anger among White Americans. Post-verdict surveys conducted by the *Washington Post* and *CNN* indicated that eighty percent of African Americans but only fifty-three percent of Whites believed

that justice was served in the case.[16] That divide seems to reflect a deeper disagreement about the existence of racism in America: in a survey conducted by *Time Magazine* in February of 1997, 68% of African Americans but only 38% of Whites agreed that racism is a significant problem in America (Lafferty, 1997).

The IDP has witnessed this gap as we have examined the extent of minority overrepresentation in special education placement in Indiana over the last four years. In an effort to gain insight into practitioners' perspectives about factors that contribute to ethnic disproportionality, during the second year of our project we conducted interviews with educators across seven school districts in highly diverse urban and near-urban school districts.[17]

While many themes regarding factors that may contribute to disproportionality emerged from these conversations, one of the more unexpected themes was reticence in discussing the topic of race. In general, we found that, particularly for White respondents, race proved a difficult topic about which to speak. Administrators who in general impressed our interviewers as articulate on a variety of topics became tongue-tied or taciturn when the conversation turned explicitly to race. Some teachers who demonstrated great precision in describing the disadvantages and educational needs of their students became unexpectedly vague when asked for detail about the ethnic breakdown of their class and often claimed not to have noticed or thought about the racial or cultural diversity present in their classroom. Said one White female teacher:

> The racial diversity— I always have a hard time with that when people ask me, because I don't pay any attention.

Another seemed to go to great lengths to avoid the question entirely:

> When you say minorities, are you, what are you speaking of?
>
> *...INTERVIEWER: Ethnic and racial minorities*
>
> ...Oh....OK...Alright...We have like...I guess we have about half and half. I don't know that I've ever really paid attention to it.

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[16] The survey reported on here was taken by the Gallup organization for CNN and *USA Today*, October 19-22, 1994.

[17] *The Context of Disproportionality:* http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/minor.html

In contrast, we found that African American teachers seemed much more aware of, and willing to talk about, the diversity in their classes. This classroom description was volunteered by an African American teacher even before we asked about diversity:

> We have twenty-three students and out of the twenty-three, I have five
> who are White and the rest are Black.

Why is It So Difficult to Talk about Race?

How is it that Blacks and Whites approach this issue so differently? Some have suggested that this phenomenon, which educational researcher Christine Sleeter (1994) has called "the culture of silence," reaches back to our nation's beginnings. In his collection of essays on post-Revolutionary War America, *Founding Brothers,* historian Joseph Ellis (2000) writes about the compromises made between slaveholding and non-slaveholding states at the Constitutional Convention that allowed the continuation of slavery, and forbade Congress from ending the institution for twenty years:

> The ultimate legacy of the American Revolution on slavery was not an
> implicit compact that it be ended, or a gentlemen's agreement between
> the two sections that it be tolerated, but rather a calculated obviousness
> that it not be talked about at all. Slavery was the unmentionable family
> secret, or the proverbial elephant in the middle of the room (p. 102).
> Historians have indeed suggested that the brutality and dehumanization
> of slavery created a problem of cognitive dissonance among early
> Americans who also viewed themselves as Christian. Simply put, it was
> easier not to talk about it.

Perhaps it is simply the differing experience of race that Black and White individuals have had, and continue to have. For African Americans, race is a part of, and has an effect on, everything in America. For one hundred years after the emancipation of African American slaves, basic rights to education and housing were determined by the color of one's skin. Theoretically, those rights were equalized by *Brown v. Board of Education* and by sweeping civil rights legislation a decade later. But fifty years after *Brown*, students of color remain more likely to attend schools with inferior facilities, poorly-trained teachers, and less adequate resources. They are more likely to be taught in lower track classes (Oakes et al., 1990; Welner & Oakes, 1996), more likely to be

suspended and expelled (Skiba et al., 2002), more likely to drop out (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Felice et al., 1981), and more likely to enter the juvenile justice system (Kennedy et al., 2001). In short, race remains a daily issue for Blacks in America: its impact cannot be avoided.

For White Americans, however, race is simply not an issue that consciously affects daily life. The ability to avoid thinking about race in general, and to be seemingly unaware of the benefits that America's racial history has conferred upon Whites, has been termed *white privilege*. In his essay entitled "Thoughts on Acknowledging and Challenging Whiteness," social justice activist Tim Wise (2002) suggested that Whites may not choose to think about the ways in which issues of race affect them because doing so would require one to acknowledge the privileges inherent in being a White American. To an individual who is identified as White, issues of race are typically discussed as a Black or other minority issue. Dr. Peggy McIntosh, a national leader in creating gender-fair and multicultural curricula, wrote eloquently about the "unearned privileges" that White Americans enjoy every day. In her article "*Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*," (McIntosh, 1990) she described her realization that her status as a White woman was itself an asset: "I can think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I can freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms." (p. 100).

Another reason that issues of race are difficult to address is the potential emotional reaction that they often elicit. Clinical psychologist Dr. Beverly Tatum argues that many Whites are reticent to broach any subject related to race for fear that their comments will be "misinterpreted" or trigger feelings of anger and rejection from minorities. Paradoxically, however, that continuing silence on the part of White Americans only creates further miscommunication and misunderstanding. In her article, *"Breaking the Silence,"* Tatum (1998) reflects on the difficulty that her White students have in talking about race. White students typically respond that the fear of offending students of color lead them to avoid talking about the issue of race. One of her students, a White female, commented that "There is a fear. The fear of speaking is overwhelming. I do not feel for me, that it is fear of rejection from people of my race, but anger and disdain from people of color (p. 116)." Students of color on the other hand, often state

bluntly: if White students talked about race, they would eventually have to acknowledge and perhaps give up some of the power and privilege they have acquired by not facing the issue of race.

Continued racial disparities and a lack of meaningful dialogue may lead minority individuals to avoid the issue as well. Without a doubt, bias and discrimination against African Americans has created a deep emotional wound that is far from healed. Noted psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint calls the seemingly minor but clearly racialized situations that African Americans experience every day *micro-aggressions* (1980). In her book, *It's the Little Things*, Lena Williams (2002) argues that feelings of frustration and anger toward Whites among African Americans are a "cumulative effect of a lifetime of racial slights and injustices suffered because of our color" (p.67). As a result, people of color may become less willing to enter into conversations about race with non-minorities, further thwarting the possibility of meaningful dialogue about race.

Together, these influences lead our society away from an honest acknowledgment of the elephant in our living room: namely, the disparities that race has created and continues to create in our schools and society. We focus on being politically correct in our conversations about race in an effort not to disrupt the status quo. As a result, our conversations about the subject have never moved from the surface level to more meaningful and productive conversations.

Can We Begin to Talk about Race? The Possibility of Courageous Conversations

Is it possible to move beyond the culture of silence and denial to honestly address the disparities that still pervade our educational system? Based on the beginnings of work with the LEAD projects (see Chapter 3), we believe that it is. We have met individuals and organizations, both White and Black, who are beginning to take steps to face racial disparities head on, with the goal of closing those gaps.

One strategy that has been effective in working with schools is having "courageous conversations." The concept, as defined by the Pacific Education Group, refers to discussions about race that allow people to openly discuss their opinions or ask questions that may produce some discomfort (Pacific Education Group, 2004). These

discussions take place in a small group setting, with ground rules that encourage respect for and tolerance of all points of view. The school corporations described in this report took the initiative to engage in these discussions and often encouraged participants to write down questions on note cards in an effort to decrease levels of anxiety. In another corporation, the school principal led monthly book discussions in which staff members were able to reflect on the ways in which poverty and culture can impact educational outcomes. The result of these conversations has often been powerful, enabling many of the participants to see how their own reservations in dealing with the issue of race have served as a barrier to problem-solving.

While engaging in these conversations appears to be an effective means to address issues of race, doing so is far from easy. Accomplishing this involves reflecting on the stereotypes that each of us grew up with, acknowledging our individual prejudices, and beginning to challenge those beliefs. While the districts involved in the LEAD projects were highly motivated to begin addressing issues of race, it should be noted that incidents that take place in a school may also serve as powerful motivators to promote discussions about race.

Additionally, explicitly planning activities that encourage these conversations (i.e., book discussions) may also decrease the tendency to avoid subjects about race. Finally, many of the participants in our LEAD projects suggested that they became increasingly comfortable discussing issues of race over time. Several participating districts noted that the continual focus on the issue helped to ensure that conversations about race took place on some level and were not avoided. As a result of observing the emergence of a district's ability to engage in these meaningful discussions, we have learned that alleviating the discomfort associated with talking about issues of race is often the result of many small steps toward that goal, as opposed to any large sudden changes. Creating environments in which "courageous conversations" can take place requires effort and dedication. While doing so may not be easy, we have observed the positive effects associated with providing people with an opportunity to openly discuss issues of race in non-threatening environments.

Another strategy that is key in helping districts move beyond the "culture of silence" regarding issues of race involves constructing a community of allies in an

attempt to create an environment that can openly deal with issues of race. In the article, "*Creating a community of allies: How one school system attempted to create an anti-racist environment*"(1999), school superintendent Irwin Blumer and researcher Beverly Tatum reported on their efforts in the Newton, Massachusetts schools to actively pierce the cycle of misinformation by recruiting individuals of all races to become *allies* in the struggle for equity. They conclude that effectively beginning to address the influence of race in our society will require a shift from passively accepting the status quo to actively engaging in behaviors that might interrupt the cycle by basing all decisions made in the district on core values that hold respect for diversity and aim for equity.

   Individual effects of conversations. We have observed the significant impact that creating an environment in which issues of equity and cultural differences are openly discussed can have at both a school and systems level. In one participating district, the effect of having "courageous conversations" and creating more positive environments in which these discussions could take place resulted in significant attitudinal changes among both teachers and administrators. When work first began in this particular district, administrators and teachers alike attributed much of the achievement gap between students of different races to levels of socio-economic status (SES). Yet, as noted in Chapter 5, poverty contributes to, but does not totally explain, ethnic disproportionality. As the district's LEAD team met regularly and discussed issues related to disproportionality, team members began to have explicit dialogue about the influence of race on disproportionality. The special education director in that district reflected on the importance of engaging in "courageous conversations," as well as the impact that these conversations can have at a systems level:

> Conversations about culture weren't happening before we began the project. I don't think we've had an administrative meeting in the last year that hasn't been part of it. I would say that is the biggest change that I see in our district. There are not just a couple of us now that are driving the conversations. We are having open conversations that you don't have to look over your shoulder to see who's listening in on this. They're open conversations that are being driven by a lot of people…in a lot of different groups, and they're feeling safe enough to open up these conversations not just with some of our employees. We can open it up and kind of bare our souls. I can make reports. I can say things to

the Board. And I can make comments in cabinet that aren't like 'That's just Special Ed speaking.' But now it's 'Gosh, this is our district issue.'

Additionally, it became apparent that these conversations also facilitated shifts in beliefs about the factors that contribute to ethnic disproportionality. When asked about what led to her shift in attributing most of the achievement disparity to factors related to SES to beginning to look at the impact of race more explicitly, one special education director stated:

> I think it was a combination of being presented with hard data as well as being challenged regarding my belief that SES was the dominant factor in Disproportionality. I began to listen deeper than I ever listened before. I think I listened and I heard, but I heard on a level instead of taking a step back, and maybe not being the active participant in the conversation but listening and watching. And then listening to some people that I really respected.

Systems effects. In addition to facilitating attitudinal changes on an individual level, engaging in open and forthright conversations about issues of race can also lead to more specific system level changes. For example, in one district, the superintendent and special education director convened a diversity task force to look more closely at how the district was dealing with issues of race and equity for all students. The task force includes school board members, administrators, teachers, staff, and community members working toward the goal of addressing the achievement gap and increasing diversity awareness in the district overall. This unexpected outcome of talking explicitly about issues of race demonstrates the fact that when we engage in meaningful conversations, even at a low level, we can begin to bring an end to the cycle of discrimination and inequality.

Summary and Conclusions

Racial oppression in our society did not end with the emancipation of slaves. In the same way discrimination in our educational system did not end with *Brown v. Board of Education*, nor with the successes of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement. As we begin the 21st century, students of color still are afforded fewer opportunities to receive a quality education. Issues of race and racism are inextricably

and tragically woven into the fabric of our history. Facing the topic of race is clearly difficult, eliciting emotional reactions that in turn prompt us to avoid the issue in polite company. Yet it is often our inability to discuss the subject that limits our ability to take effective action. If we are ever to evolve into a society that can transcend the bitter legacy of race and racism in America, "courageous conversations" that actively seek to dismantle discrimination must become the norm. The experience of some Indiana schools provides an encouraging example, showing that it is indeed possible to address issues of racial disparity through honest and courageous dialogue.

CONCLUSIONS

This report, the fourth in a series, describes a variety of approaches through which Indiana is attempting to address issues of ethnic disproportionality in special education. There clearly are challenges that remain in this work: like much of the rest of the nation, Indiana's data continue to provide evidence of racial disparities in rates of special education service and, in fact, these disparities appear to have widened since the first report was completed. On the other hand, there are highly encouraging signs as well: chief among them is the commitment by eight school corporations to begin piloting a process and to implement specific programs with the express goal of reducing disproportionate service in special education.

Ethnic Disproportionality at the State and Local Level

Although this year's data were presented in a somewhat different format in order to reflect emerging national trends in the field, results from the 2003-2004 school year continue to show a pattern of disproportionate representation in special education in Indiana similar to that found in previous reports. Although ethnic disproportionality is not in evidence in overall special education identification figures for the state of Indiana, there continues to be clear evidence of disproportionality in several disability categories and educational environments. At the state level, African American students continue to be overrepresented relative to other students in the *Emotionally Disabled*—Full-Time category, as well as in *Mild*, *Moderate* and *Severe Mental Disabilities* and *Deaf-Blind*. American Indian students show some evidence of overrepresentation in SMD and TBI. Students in the Multiracial ethnic category are overrepresented in the category *Deaf-Blind*.

It has become apparent that disproportionality in placement in educational environments is also a concern at the state (Skiba et al., 2001) and national (Fierros & Conroy, 2002) levels. Here in Indiana, African American students are under-represented in *Regular Class* placements, proportionate in *Resource Room* placements, and

overrepresented in all other more restrictive placements. Hispanic students are somewhat overrepresented in *Separate Class* placements, while Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, and Multiracial students were overrepresented in some residential settings. It is interesting to note that the level of African American disproportionality in educational environments appears to be greater than disproportionality in disability categories.

As in previous years, analyses were conducted to identify which school corporations show evidence of disproportionality. For African American students, disproportionality at the local level was most evident in overrepresentation in EDFT, MiMD, and LD. It is interesting to note that disproportionality in *Learning Disability* emerges only in corporation-level analyses, suggesting that statewide figures showing no disproportionality may be products of districts with over- and under-representation in this category canceling each other out in the overall data. As at the statewide level, African American students were under-represented in general education settings, and under-represented in more restrictive settings.

Disproportionality for Hispanic students showed a distinctly different pattern, indicating *under*-representation in most disability categories and educational environments. The only category in which a problem of overrepresentation emerged at the corporation level was in *Resource Room* placements. This pattern is somewhat at variance from previous studies in states (e.g., California) with a higher enrollment of English-language learners (Artiles et al., 2002). Future analyses will need to explore trends in Hispanic special education enrollment across time and the meaning of disproportionality for Hispanic students.

Taking Action: Addressing Ethnic Disproportionality through the Local Equity Action Development Projects

The most encouraging development in addressing ethnic disproportionality in the state of Indiana has been the development of Local Equity Action Development (LEAD) Projects in eight school corporations. Developed as a result of the collaboration of those districts with the Indiana Disproportionality Project, the process enables school personnel at the local level to make use of their own data and resources to better understand and address issues of disproportionality and equity. The model assumes that plans must be

local, based upon an evaluation of local data, and must directly address the awkward and sometimes difficult topic of race.

The LEAD planning process moves through four distinct stages, including forming the planning team, identifying an action strategy of greatest potential impact, developing the plan, and implementing that plan. Eight corporations in six planning districts have begun working through the LEAD process. Their progress on developing plans that can address some aspect of disproportionality locally is highly encouraging. The local plans included a revised GEI process, differentiated instruction, an early literacy model, early intervention, and a district-wide task force on closing the achievement gap. As interest in these projects has grown, so have requests for technical assistance. Project staff at Indiana University have developed technical assistance modules in a number of areas, including peer coaching, inclusion, early literacy interventions, math instruction, alternatives to grade retention, and differentiated instruction.

As local educators have begun the process of addressing local concerns that may contribute to inequitable outcomes in special education, it has become apparent that effective teams address a number of important issues. First, collaboration between special and general education is essential: disproportionality in special education is not simply a problem for special education, but a sign that equity may need to be addressed in multiple systems across both general and special education. Second, the most effective teams did not shy away from conversations about equity and race. Third, the use of data is essential in expanding the notion of accountability to include all students, no matter what their disability or background. Finally, addressing disproportionality is a complex process; in order to ensure the resources necessary to address the issue, schools and corporations must integrate the LEAD plan with other building- and corporation-wide initiatives such as school improvement plans.

The Referral to Eligibility Ratio

In any change process, evaluation is essential. Administrators, teachers, and parents want to know whether the effort put into change is truly making a difference. In

the past year, the IDP has developed a measure to track short term change—the Referral to Eligibility Ratio—that is currently being piloted in some Indiana corporations.

The Referral to Eligibility Ratio is a measure that is intended as a way to track ethnic disproportionality and the overall effectiveness of the pre-referral intervention and referral process. The measure allows for planning districts and schools to: 1) assess whether efforts to improve the pre-referral intervention process are truly making a difference, 2) examine in which stages of the eligibility determination process disproportionality may be occurring, and 3) evaluate the effects of changes that take place in the short term on ethnic disproportionality (e.g., within a single year). In summary, then, the Referral to Eligibility Ratio can provide useful information to educators about the effectiveness and equity of the special education referral process.

Indiana corporations working with the Indiana Disproportionality Project (IDP) on ethnic disproportionality have reported that they find the concept of the ratios to be quite useful. IDP staff is currently working on the development of a software tool that will calculate schools' changes in overall disproportionality figures, measurement of pre-referral intervention team effectiveness, and disproportionality within the pre-referral and referral processes. Participating corporations will continue to work with the project to refine the approach in order to ensure its practicality in school settings.

Factors that Do and Do Not Contribute to Disproportionality

In Chapter 5, we summarized two research reports that sought to address underlying assumptions that are often made about the causes of ethnic disproportionality. First we explored whether ethnic disproportionality in special education can be explained by poverty and other demographic characteristics. The second research report investigated whether minority overrepresentation in more restrictive settings is a function of the fact that minority students are represented more often in disability categories (e.g., *Emotional Disability*) that tend to be served in more restrictive placements.

In the first study, results showed that poverty could not be called upon as the primary explanation of African American disproportionality in special education. Although poverty is a significant predictor of special education placement, it is not a good predictor of disproportionality. Across a number of disability categories and

settings, poverty entered as a significant predictor of disproportionality inconsistently if at all. In only one category, MiMD, did increased poverty at the corporation level predict increased disproportionality. In other categories, such as EDFT, results were counterintuitive: richer districts were more likely to have higher levels of African American overrepresentation in EDFT. Further analyses suggest that, where poverty makes a contribution to ethnic disproportionality, it acts primarily to magnify existing racial disparities.

Some have suggested that African American overrepresentation in more restrictive environments is due to the fact that disproportionality is more likely to occur in those categories (e.g., *Emotional Disability*) that tend to be served in more restrictive environments. To test that hypothesis, we examined disproportionality in educational environments *within* each disability category. The results did not support the original hypothesis. In general, African American students were overrepresented in more restrictive environments and under-represented in less restrictive environments, regardless of the disability category. In fact, overrepresentation in more restrictive settings was greatest in those disability categories, LD and CD, that tend to be served in less restrictive settings.

Difficult Conversations: The Black-White Perspective Gap

To solve a problem, we must be able to address it directly. Yet previous reports from both the IDP and other researchers have noted the difficulty that many educators have in directly talking about the issue of race. In Chapter 6, we addressed the questions, "Why is it so difficult to talk about racial issues," and "What can be done to break the silence around these issues?" Issues of race may be difficult for White Americans to talk about because the perceived impact of race on their daily lives is dramatically less than that of Black Americans. For both White and Black Americans, discussions of race are often emotionally charged and can lead to anger, rejection, or misunderstanding. "Courageous conversations" (Pacific Education Group, 2004) that allow people to openly discuss their opinions in an environment of respect and civility can be an effective means of beginning to address issues of race in schools where ethnic disproportionality exists. Finally, direct attention to issues of race in some participating districts has led to changed

attitudes about race among teachers and administrators and an increased commitment to addressing equity issues.

Summary

The data in this report present a mixed picture concerning the issue of ethnic disproportionality in special education in Indiana. On the one hand, the data continue to show disproportionality in disability categories and educational environments, especially for African American students. Yet, on the other hand, a number of school corporations across the state have committed themselves to a process for addressing equity issues in special education. That process has led to change within districts, to the development of new measures to monitor progress at the local level, and in some cases to a district-wide commitment to address local equity issues across both general and special education. There is still much that we do not understand about the nature of disproportionality—the issue of Hispanic under-representation, in particular, needs to be more fully explored. Yet as Indiana's educators continue to make a commitment to confront equity issues in general and special education, there can be no doubt the state of Indiana will gain valuable information and new perspectives that will improve our capacity to address this complex issue.

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