

Centering Equity & Disrupting Disproportionality

**Special Education Directors Academy
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Dana Floyd, ESD 105

Jennifer Story, OSPI

Nancy Smith, Yakima SD



Land Acknowledgement



ONE Logo
by Roger Fernandes
(Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe)



[School District & Nearest Federally Recognized Tribes](#)

[Washington Tribes Map](#)

Overview



Defining Disproportionality

Why Disproportionality Matters

Diving Into the Data

- Using data tools
- Exploring root causes

Regional Perspective – ESD 105

- Defining our reason
- Working with a national expert

District Perspective – Yakima School District

Resources and Next Steps

Getting to Know You

- How much prior knowledge do you have about **disproportionality in special education**?
- In the chat, please share one question you have about this topic that you hope this presentation will answer.





What is Disproportionality?

Disproportionality in Special Education

States must collect and examine data for each of their districts annually to determine if significant **disproportionality based on race or ethnicity** is occurring with respect to:

1. The **identification of children as children with disabilities**, including identification of children with **particular disabilities**
2. The **placement** of children in particular educational environments
3. The incidence, duration, and type of **disciplinary actions**, including suspensions/expulsions

² IDEA Data Center (May, 2014). *Methods for Assessing Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education: A Technical Assistance Guide (Revised)*, Westat, Rockville, MD, Julie Bollmer, Jim Bethel, Tom Munk, and Amy Bitterman. Page 1.

Fast Facts About Disproportionality

- “Students of color, with the exception of Asian students, are identified for special education at a higher rate than their White peers”³
- Students of color are more likely to be placed in a more restrictive educational setting than White students⁴
- Students with disabilities and students of color are suspended, expelled, referred to law enforcement, and subjected to physical restraint and isolation many times more often than other students relative to enrollment^{5,6}

³ National Center for Learning Disabilities (2020). *Significant disproportionality in special education: Current trends and actions for impact*. Retrieved from <http://nclld.co/ta>.

⁴ Grindal, T., Schifter, L. A., Schwartz, G., & Hehir, T. (2019). *Racial differences in special education identification and placement: Evidence across three states*. *Harvard Educational Review*, 89(4), 525-553.

⁵ Office for Civil Rights (2020). *2017-2018 Civil Rights Data Collection: The use of restraint and seclusion on children with disabilities in K-12 schools*. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/restraint-and-seclusion.pdf>

⁶ Office for Civil Rights (2021). *An overview of exclusionary discipline practices in public schools for the 2017-2018 school year*. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-exclusionary-school-discipline.pdf>





How Does Washington Measure Up?

Inclusionary Practices Project (IPP) Impact

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	Data Group	2018 Baseline	2022 Data	Change from Baseline
LRE 1: placed in general education for 80-100% of the school day	Inclusionary Practices Pilot Districts (n=100)	44%	62%	18
	All Students with Disabilities	57%	63%	6.8
	Black Students with Disabilities	49%	51%	1.8

State Special Education Snapshot



	All PreK-12 Students	Students with Disabilities	Black Students with Disabilities
2021 PreK-12 Student Enrollment	1,091,429	146,750	8,169
2021 PreK Inclusion (LRE; Indicator 6A)	N/A	25.7%	26.9%
2020 Kindergarten Readiness (WaKIDS)	51.5%	22.4%	14.4%
2021 K-12 LRE1, 80-100% general ed	N/A	62.4%	50.7%
2020 Graduation	82.5%	63.9%	55.6%
2020 Drop-out	8.5%	12.0%	17.4%
2019-20 Post-School Outcomes	N/A	69.9%	73.3%

The Equity Imperative

Barriers to equity for students with disabilities:

- Low expectations.
- Disproportionate identification, segregation & discipline for students of color.
- Lack of access and opportunity to core instruction from content experts.
- School schedules contribute to removals from core instruction in general education.
- Teacher and staff shortages.
- Training needs for school staff & educators who support them.
- Staffing models that encourage segregation.



**How can we
remove or
reduce these
barriers?**

So, here's why this is...

!!!
Important

- Referrals for special education identification come with the best of intentions – staff, families, and education partners observe student needs and explore ways to support students.
- Disproportionality is a mechanism to measure and analyze adult responses to student needs, across shared student identities – race and ability.
- What we must all keep in mind is that, even with those good intentions, adult decisions can harm students when actions do not address the root cause(s) of student need and/or are not culturally affirming.



The background features a light blue gradient with several overlapping circles in shades of pink, purple, and yellow. At the bottom, there are multiple blue lines with circular markers, some of which are connected by vertical lines to the text area, suggesting a data series or a network graph.

Diving Into Data

2020 Performance Data Profiles

Purpose

- Designed to provide district staff access to **district-level** special education data across 15 performance indicators.

Profile features include:

- Graduation, Drop-out Placement, Discipline & Outcome Summaries
- **Disproportionality & Significant Disproportionality Risk Ratios**
- District-level Data Charts Across the Indicators

Access

- School, district, and ESD staff can access to the Data Profiles at OSPI's Data Collection page.

[2020 Performance Data Profiles](#)



2021 PK-12 Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Data Platform

Purpose

- Designed to provide district and building staff access to unsuppressed, **school-level** special education demographic and placement data.

Platform features include:

- Demographic, Placement & Outcome Summaries
- PK-2 & K-12 Displays
- **K-12 Risk Ratio Calculations (connected with disproportionality data)**

Access

- School, district, and ESD staff can request access to the Data Platform by emailing specialeddata@k12.wa.us (or by reaching out to your District Special Education Director).





Measuring Disproportionality in Special Education

- **Risk ratios** are calculated to determine disproportionality in special education data
- A risk ratio is a measure of the likelihood that students from a specific racial/ethnic group will be identified or placed in a particular category, compared with all other students



Risk Ratios

- A risk ratio of 1.0 is neutral, meaning students from that group are *just as likely* as all other students to be identified or placed in that category
- A risk ratio over 1.0 represents **potential overrepresentation** 
 - For example: A risk ratio of 4.0 means students from that group are *4 times as likely* as all other students to be identified or placed in that category
- A risk ratio under 1.0 represents **potential underrepresentation** 
 - For example: A risk ratio of 0.5 means students from that group are *half as likely* as all other students to be identified or placed in that category



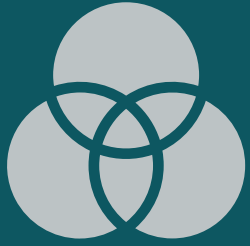
Sample Data: Disproportionality in Identification (District A)

	2021-22 School Year	American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	White	Two or More	TOTAL
1	The total number of students from each ethnic or racial background in my district.	25	8719	658	2642	49	6262	1931	20286
2	The percentages of these students in comparison to the total district population.	.1%	43%	3.2%	13%	.2%	31%	9.5%	100%
3	Of the total number of students in my district, the number receiving special education services.	N<10	385	125	428	N<10	594	167	1699
4	RISK INDEX - Of the number of students from each ethnic or racial group, the percent receiving special education services.	0.0%	22.7%	7.3%	25%	0.0%	35%	10%	8.3%
5	2021-22 RISK RATIO	0.00	0.37	2.19	2.12	0.00	1.31	1.03	
	2020-21 RISK RATIO	0.00	0.38	2.23	2.11	0.00	1.28	1.05	
	2019-20 RISK RATIO	2.99	0.38	2.05	2.0	0.00	1.28	1.14	

Sample Data: Disproportionality in Identification (District B)

2021-22 School Year	American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	White	Two or More	TOTAL
The total number of students from each ethnic or racial background in my district.	48	6704	457	2001	38	8621	1869	19738
The percentages of these students in comparison to the total district population.	0.2%	34%	2.3%	10%	0.1%	44%	9.4%	100%
Of the total number of students in my district, the number receiving special education services.	N<10	265	90	295	N<10	841	159	1650
RISK INDEX - Of the number of students from each ethnic or racial group, the percent receiving special education services.	0%	16%	5.5%	17.9%	0%	51%	9.6%	8.3%
2021-22 RISK RATIO	0.00	0.37	2.41	1.92	0.00	1.32	1.01	
2020-21 RISK RATIO	3.32	0.37	2.13	1.91	0.00	1.32	1.09	
2019-20 RISK RATIO	3.12	0.36	2.19	1.93	0.00	1.31	1.07	

Unpacking Disproportionality in Special Education



For the data set reviewed, which groups experienced a risk ratio in 2021-22 of over 2.0? Over 3.0? Under 1.0?



For which group(s) has the ratio been over 2.0 (or under 1.0) for two consecutive years? For three consecutive years?



Over the three-year span, which group(s) experienced an increasing risk ratio? Which group(s) experienced a decreasing risk ratio?



So What... Now What?

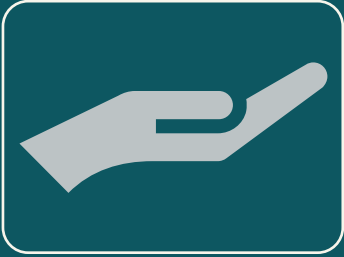


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How Can Districts Examine and Address Disproportionality?

Exploring Potential Root Causes



What types of pre-referral interventions are provided to students before they are referred for special education? For how long? By whom?



What types of progress data is collected and analyzed before referral? What rate of progress do students experience?



What existing biases and beliefs could be contributing to opportunity gaps and potential over-referral? In what ways are biases disrupted through engagement with staff, families, and interactions with students that affirm racial, linguistic, and cultural identities?

Exploring Beliefs, Contexts, and Practices

- National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCREST) tools provide school- and district-level opportunities to analyze the knowledge, skills and dispositions as well as contextual factors that may lead to institutionalized practices that manifest themselves in disproportionate identification and placement.

OSPI has adapted these tools and added related resources (such as a student file review and an action planning template), which can all be found [here](#).





Disproportionality - A Regional Perspective

Dana Floyd, Executive Director of Special Services, ESD 105

Regional Data - Our Reason

Nine of our districts were designated as having disproportionate representation for the 2021-22 school year in the areas of:

- **1 district:** (a) out-of-school suspensions of 10 or fewer days for students identified as Hispanic, and (b) total disciplinary removals for students identified as Hispanic.
- **3 districts:** Disproportionate Representation in Specific Disability Categories for students identified as American Indian who are eligible under the category of Communication Disorder
- **4 districts:** Disproportionate Representation in Specific Disability Categories for students identified as Hispanic who are eligible under the category of Intellectual Disability and students identified as Hispanic who are eligible under the category of Specific Learning Disability
- **1 district:** Significant Disproportionality for students identified as White who are eligible under the disability category of emotional behavioral disability, and did not continue to meet the standard for reasonable progress

Meet Dr. Edward Fergus

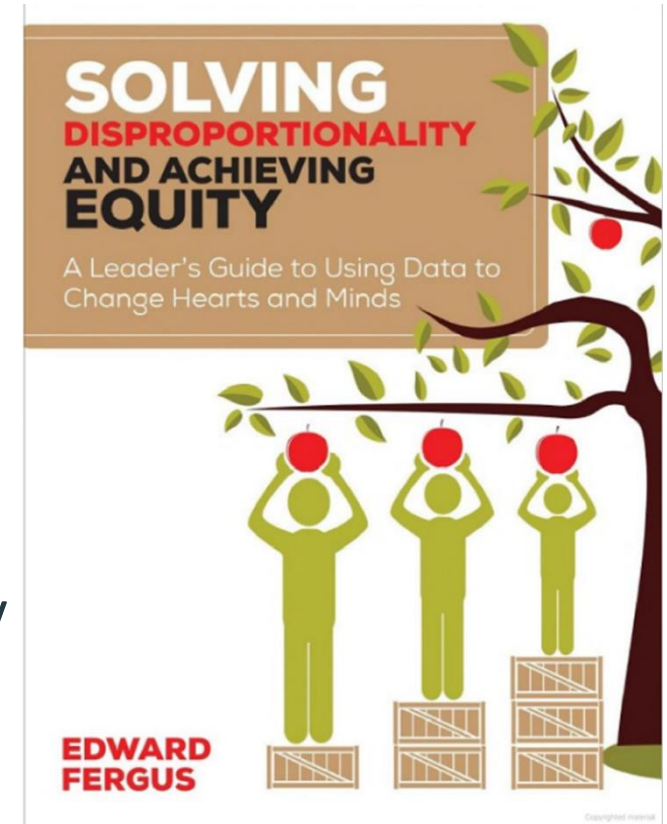
Professor of Urban Education and Policy at Rutgers University

Director, Disproportionality and Equity Lab

Support of capacity building for school districts cited for disproportionality and significant disproportionality



Dr. Edward Fergus, Professor of Urban Education and Policy, and Director, Disproportionality and Equity Lab



Professional Development Cohort

The two phases of work focus on the following capacity areas:

- 1) understanding of disproportionality root causes; and
- 2) equity literacy driven mindset for plan implementation.

Structure of Our Work

Phase 1: Root Cause Sessions

Session 1: Naming the Disproportionality Data Patterns

Sessions 2 and 3: Review of Target Practices and Processes

Session 4: Determining Remedies and Building Action Plan to Address Causes

Structure of Our Work

Phase 2: Build Equity Literacy to Organize Action Plan Implementation

Session 1: Equity Literacy - Unpacking Bias Based Beliefs

Session 2: Equity Literacy - Practicing an Equity Belief Lens

Session 3: Equity Literacy - Building Universal Equity Principles



Significant Disproportionality - A School District Perspective

Nancy Smith, Executive Director of Special Education, Yakima SD

Intent vs. Impact



Next Steps...

Reflect on your role and how you can disrupt disproportionality in your district or organization. What will your next step be?

Resources

- Fong, Rowena (2014). *Addressing Racial Disproportionality and Disparities in Human Services: A Multisystemic Approach*. Columbia University Press.
- [IDEA Data Center Success Gaps Toolkit – Addressing Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity](#)
- [National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems – LEA Tool for Examining General Education, Early Intervention, Referral, Identification, Placement, and Access to the General Education Curriculum Processes](#)
- [National Center for Systemic Improvement – Data Literacy with an Equity Mindset](#)
- [OSPI – Special Education Inclusion Handbook](#)
- [OSPI – Special Education Inclusionary Practices Project and Resources](#)
- [OSPI – Special Education LRE Data Platform Video](#)
- [OSPI – Special Education Myths & Facts about Inclusionary Practices in Washington State](#)
- [OSPI - Project Aware Grant – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [University of Washington - Administrators Improving Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(AIMS\)](#)
- [Washington State Multi-Tiered System of Supports Resources and Professional Development](#)



Presenter Info

Nancy Smith

Executive Director of Special Education, Yakima School District

Smith.Nancy@ysd7.org

Dana Floyd

Executive Director of Special Services, ESD 105

Dana.Floyd@esd105.org

Jennifer Story

Special Education Program Improvement Coordinator, OSPI

Jennifer.story@k12.wa.us

