

Duquesne University

Duquesne Scholarship Collection

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Summer 8-2022

Examining Overrepresentation in Special Education amongst African Americans Diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance in the State of Pennsylvania

Krisa Franzetta

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Franzetta, K. (2022). Examining Overrepresentation in Special Education amongst African Americans Diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance in the State of Pennsylvania (Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd/2081>

This Immediate Access is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AMONGST
AFRICAN AMERICANS DIAGNOSED WITH EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE IN
THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Krisa Franzetta

August 2022

Copyright by
Krisa Franzetta

2022

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AMONGST
AFRICAN AMERICANS DIAGNOSED WITH EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE IN
THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

By

Krisa Franzetta

Approved July 1, 2022

Ann Huang, Ph.D.
Associate Professor Department of
Educational Foundations and Leadership
(Committee Chair)

Bridget Green, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor Department of
Educational Foundations and Leadership
(Committee Member)

James Schreiber, Ph.D.
School of Nursing
(Committee Member)

ABSTRACT

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AMONGST AFRICAN AMERICANS DIAGNOSED WITH EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE IN THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

By

Krisa Franzetta

August 2022

Dissertation supervised by Ann Huang, Ph.D.

This study examines the disproportionality in special education, regarding African American students being overrepresented, specifically under the disability category of Emotional Disturbance (ED) within the state of Pennsylvania. Demographic information was collected with the use of secondary data provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, using 648 educational programs across 29 intermediate units. Data were analyzed with statistical representation of percentages as related to risk composition and the E-Formula. The results yielded an average risk of African American students being two times more likely to be diagnosed with ED than their White peers. Additional results from the calculation of the E-Formula showed an overrepresentation of African American students within the state of Pennsylvania under the disability category of ED between the schoolyears of 2011-2021. The results of the study can be used to aid in the programming

for future teacher preparation program, training for current teachers working in the field, and to initiate change amongst legislation regarding determining appropriate thresholds for significant disproportionality.

Keywords: emotional disturbance, disproportionality, overrepresentation, African American, critical race theory, Pennsylvania, equity

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my past and present students at Holy Family Institute. I am appreciative of the lessons that you all have taught me towards becoming a better educator. I will always support and advocate for students who feel that they may not always be heard.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am taking this time to thank those individuals, who without their support, I would not have been able to fulfill the requirements of this dissertation. First and foremost, I would like to thank God. Throughout this journey, I have relied heavily on my faith, and I am forever thankful for the blessings that God has provided in my life. Secondly, to my husband, Anthony. Your support and encouragement during this time is something that I will cherish. There were many long nights, and you had no hesitation to take on any extra responsibilities. Thank you for sticking with me through every step, I love you. To my children, August and Stella. I hope that during this time, you understand that Mommy did this to show you that anything is possible, to follow your dreams, and to remember that with hard work, you can achieve anything. I love you two more than you will ever know! To my parents, Mom and Dad. I am so blessed to be your daughter. You have encouraged and supported me every step of the way. You never gave up on me, even when I wanted to give up on myself. As much as this degree is mine, it is also yours, as I would not be where I am without you both. I love you tremendously. To my brothers and their families, I am thankful to be surrounded by your praise and support throughout this journey. Thank you to my extended family; my in-laws for your help throughout these last four years, and particularly to my Aunt Libby for making sure I kept up with both work and school. To my Bestie C's, you both understand the meaning of friendship and I am fortunate to have you both by my side. I love you to the moon and back! I also want to thank my co-workers of Holy Family, you know who you are; I will always appreciate how you have celebrated my highs and talked me through my lows, you all

hold a special place in my heart. Lastly, to my advisor and chair, Dr. Ann Huang, thank you for believing in me and pushing me through to the end. I also want to thank my committee members, Dr. Bridget Green and Dr. Jim Schreiber for your patience, guidance, and knowledge, which has assisted me in completing my dissertation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	iv
Dedication	vi
Acknowledgement	vii
List of Abbreviations	xii
List of Tables	xiii
List of Figures	xiv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Introduction to the Problem	1
Significance of the Problem	3
Importance of this Research	4
Theoretical Framework	5
Relevant Literature	6
Problem Statement	7
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review	10
Overview	10
Historical Timeline – African Americans	11
IDEA & Emotional Disturbance	12
Disproportionality by Race	16
Referrals in Special Education	19

COVID-19 Impact on Education	22
Effect on Student Outcomes	24
Theoretical Framework	28
Empirical Literature	30
Summary	34
Chapter 3: Methodology	37
Overview	37
Research Questions	38
Data Source	39
Participants and Setting.....	39
Research Design.....	41
Variables	41
Materials	42
Procedures.....	43
Interobserver Agreement	44
Data Analysis	44
Validity and Reliability.....	47
Summary	48
Chapter 4: Results.....	49
Overview.....	49
Emotional Disturbance Racial Percentage.....	49
Risk Composition.....	50
E-Formula for Overrepresentation.....	52

IOA	54
Summary	54
Chapter 5: Discussion	56
Overview	56
Summary of Results	57
Relevancy of CRT	58
Relevancy Equity in IDEA	59
Implications for Policy and Practice	61
Limitations	66
Recommendations for Future Research	67
Summary	69
References	71

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Cognitive Impairment (CI)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Critical Race Theory (CRT)
Education for All Handicapped Children (ECH)
Emotional Disturbance (ED)
Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
Individualized Education Program (IEP)
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
Intellectual Disability (ID)
Intermediate Unit (IU)
Local Area Agency (LEA)
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
National Research Council (NRC)
Office for Civil Rights (OCR)
Special Education Data Reports (SEDR)
United States Department of Education (USDOE)

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Total Students Receiving Special Education.....	40
Table 2: Research Questions and Procedures	46
Table 3: Percentage of Students ED	50
Table 4: Risk Composition	52
Table 5: E-Formula Results	54

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Components of CRT.....	29
Figure 2: Calculation Procedures for Risk.....	51
Figure 3: Calculation Procedures for E-Formula.....	53

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

Over the past five decades, disproportionate representation in special education, based on race, has been widespread across the areas of Emotional Disturbance (ED), Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), and Intellectual Disabilities (ID) (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Dunn, 1986). Disproportionality can be defined as being over or under-represented in an environment that skews from that of the total population (Alexander, 2010). Three categories under which disproportionality takes place are: within the achievement gap of White students compared to minority groups, the number of students who are considered the minority are underrepresented in gifted education, and the overrepresentation of students of minority status in special education (Ford & Kea, 2009). In addition, reports from the Federal Department of Education and Office for Civil Rights have shown significant racial and ethnic disparity, including identification by disability category, educational placement, and disciplinary action (Federal Register, 2014). This discrepancy has gained attention, which resulted in the National Researcher Council (NRC), to conduct research several times (Klingner et al., 2005). Additional data have also shown that while overrepresentation is amongst all disability categories, it is more prevalent within high-incidence areas (Harry & Klinger, 2006).

In the United States, strides have been made in special education, however there is still more that can be accomplished. In 1975, Congress passed into law, what would later become known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under IDEA, students were given access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). More inclusion of children with disabilities with their typically developing peers was the proposed outcome of IDEA. Difficulty

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

arose when students with disabilities who were historically marginalized (e.g., African Americans) needed to be educated (Losen & Orfield, 2002). More recently, there has been aggressive means at addressing the racial disproportionality within special education, evident by the upholding of former President Obama's rule that addressed such concerns (Tefera & Fischman, 2020). This ruling was to ensure that:

...states, districts, and schools are required to use a standard method to answer and address policy regulations regarding racial disproportionality in the identification and discipline practices of students of color with disabilities (Tefera & Fischman, 2020, p. 434.)

This progress does not go unnoticed, however, there continues to be a considerable amount of work that needs to be done regarding disproportionality within special education.

In the state of Pennsylvania, according to the Commonwealth Foundation, in public schools where the general population of students are White, 90% of the special education population continues to service students that are African American or Hispanic (Ladner, 2004). An analysis conducted by the Research for Action (RFA) based in Philadelphia concluded that Pennsylvania has one of the largest gaps regarding educational opportunities and outcomes for students of color (RFA, 2018). Within the state of Pennsylvania, current trends in special education have shown an increase in the population of special education students, but a decrease in funding towards the services being offered. This can in turn influence the disparities seen regarding race and special education diagnosis, if there are not going to be adequate supports and services in place (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2019).

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Significance of the Problem

Racial disproportionality is mostly observed within high incident disability categories, with African American students continuing to be diagnosed twice as more within Emotional Disturbance (ED) and almost three times more with Cognitive Impairment (CI) than their White peers (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2011). Disproportionality in special education is an involved problem because it also takes into consideration “sociodemographic factors” (Skiba et al., 2008, p. 272). Identifying students based on factors that are beyond what is meant to be used (e.g., medical, developmental, cognitive functioning) makes the process more subjective (Klinger et al., 2005).

One area in which this privilege or dominance of another race can be seen, is in the basis of education and educational rights within the United States. Under law, students who have disabilities are eligible to receive special education services, which are to include support and services that are individualized to the child, adding behavioral supports if applicable, for students to achieve success in school (Losen et al., 2014). If a student is misdiagnosed, specifically due to race, this can influence the type of services that the child is intended to receive (Moll et al., 2014). Additionally, African American students who are diagnosed with ED may have academic and social weaknesses, due to the lack of access to the general education curriculum and setting with their typical peers (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Not only is academic growth and accessibility to the general education curriculum a concern, but there is also a concern with discipline and how this differs for African American students diagnosed with ED, as compared to their White peers (Annamma et al., 2014). It is also documented that African American students will receive consequences for subjective behaviors (e.g., excessive noise, being out in the hall) as opposed to their White peers who would be given consequences for objective

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

behaviors (e.g., smoking) (Skiba et al., 2002). This is important because students who are in special education, compared to peers within general education, have a higher rate of suspension, although the comparison of behaviors in these situations is similar (Meiners, 2007). Furthermore, it can have a lasting impact on the students, considering of the African American population diagnosed with ED, have a 50% drop-out rate (McKenna, 2013).

Importance of this Research

With the start of research (Dunn, 1986) on the disproportionality of race, specifically African Americans, and their overrepresentation in special education, there is still inconsistency as to why this phenomenon occurred and continues to occur more than thirty years later. The staggering statistics on the additional theme of poor student outcomes show that little to know improvement has been made in the over identification and representation of African Americans under the disability category of ED (Bradley et al., 2008). Moreover, research indicates that there is a discrepancy between that of *overrepresentation* and *disproportionality*. Research articles attempt to distinguish between the two citing the following three areas: the representation of minority groups, the disability category, and the number of students having access to special education versus gifted education within the two subcategories mentioned above (Ford, 2012).

There are many factors that can contribute to the overrepresentation of African American students being diagnosed primarily with ED, which if not addressed, will continue to rise (McKenna, 2013). Regarding the referral process including evaluating students for diagnosis, clinicians may have an implicit bias, which could result in the way the evaluations are conducted for students of different races (Guerrero et al., 2011). Additionally, if the current practices continue, accessibility to the correct special education services will continue to lead to distinct

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

populations of students having a lack of academic achievement and a continued rate of drop-out (Basch, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

It is essential, when the implications in which race is at the forefront of inconsistency and mistreatment, that the framework of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) is utilized as a lens of analysis. The aim of CRT is bringing attention to racism and to understand that the societal norm (i.e., that of White people) is used to silence those in marginalized ethnic and racial groupings (Bell, 1991). The basis of CRT stems from the Critical Legal Studies, in which advocacy of racial implications within the legal system, needed to be brought to the front (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Within education, Ladson-Billings applied CRT within the areas of curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment measures that would be accessible to all students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The importance of the application of CRT was to review the findings of the curriculum to be applicable of all learners, that instructional strategies would match that of the diversity within the classroom, and that assessments for students were rightful to the learner.

There are five components of CRT that explain how in theory, CRT plays a role in the racial effects of society. In his examination of CRT, Hartlep summarizes the five components as, “(1) the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (2) the idea of an interest convergence; (3) the social construction of race; (4) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling; and (5) the notion that Whites have actually been recipients of civil rights legislation” (Hartlep, 2009, p. 6). These components show that the concept of racism is downplayed. Individuals who are primarily White have the idea that *color does not exist*. This idea gives individuals the ability to pass the buck when it comes to people of color going through

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

a challenging time. To acknowledge racism, if there is something that they can get out of said acknowledgement; raising the question, *what is in it for me?* Under further review of the characteristics, it can be understood that the racism is something that continues to exist and when applied under these components, will continue to exist, whether it be within legality or within educational studies.

The CRT can change the way that preservice teachers are prepared in handling the diversity within the classroom. Additionally, CRT can challenge the current strategies in place when it comes to what is being taught and how it is being taught within our general education programming. The goal is for there to be equity in education.

Relevant Literature

Disproportionality in special education first made an appearance in academic literature in 1968 (i.e., Dunn), but has since gained momentum, considering the long-term effects this may have on the groups of students that are affected (Sullivan & Bal, 2013). There are several factors as to why this discrimination continues to occur, decades later, and those are due in part to how the reporting under IDEA is regulated (IDEA, Section 618). At the state level, the application is unsuccessful because a large part of data is self-reported locally (Massey & Rosenbaum, 2005). An additional factor is the parental involvement, but to the extent of understanding one's rights under IDEA, and not knowing how to advocate for the needs of their children. These factors often result in the misplacement of students into inappropriate classrooms, thus causing inaccessibility to the same resources as their peers (Losen & Welner, 2001).

The phenom of disproportionality continues to be at the heart of special education issues, despite the attempts of protections within IDEA (Voulgarides & Tefera, 2017). While the literature over the last five decades has outlined statistics within special education

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

disproportionality, also contributing to the possibility as to why, additional examination of such requires a multifaceted approach (Tefera & Fischman, 2020). Concluding that there is not just one reason as to why disproportionality exists, but instead a multitude of reasons, that all need to be addressed to see equity within special education. Some of the factors that should be taken into consideration are the culture within a school, the referral process, the demographic make-up, and the implications of such when it comes to identifying students (Girvan, McIntosh, & Smolkowski, 2017). The factor of culture within a school does not only relate to the practices that the school is currently enforcing, but rather who are the schools staffing. A shift to staffing teachers who have a culturally diverse background or training continues to be a concern, as they seem to be few and far between (Valle-Riestra, Shealy, & Cramer, 2011). This in turn relates to the referral process, in which a more subjective approach is taken, due to a lack of culturally diverse or culturally responsive educators (Mason-Williams et al., 2017). Additionally, the demographic make-up continues to show that disproportionality continues to show up within schools in which Caucasian students make up the majority (Coker, 2020). All these factors in turn lead to implications for African American students diagnosed as the majority within high-incident disability categories, the most prominent being the school-to-prison pipeline (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014).

Problem Statement

According to the former director of the Office of Special Education for the U.S. Department of Education, students that are of racial and ethnic minority should be placed proportionately in special education classes as they would in general education, and that anything different is displayed within the data, then that is a disproportionate representation (Posny, 2007). However, while the concept of not having a disproportionate representation is clear, it

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

continues to be studied and reported across the public-school setting (Albrecht et al., 2011; Losen et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2014).

Current research suggests that while disproportionality is a continued concern in the United States, the reason it occurs is still unknown (Bleak et al., 2019). There have been studies that put blame on the referral process and the bias that occurs within the classroom setting (Thorius & Maxcy, 2014). Moreover, it falls on moving policy into practice, amendments to IDEA are just not enough (Voulgardies & Tefera, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine special education data, specific to the state of Pennsylvania, and to determine if there are patterns within the racial demographics of students identified for special education services, within the data. Current issues within special education in Pennsylvania are around the increase in students that need special education services with a decrease in funding for special education services (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2019). Additionally, outcomes from an analysis of special education reporting data confirmed that an overrepresentation was founded for students, African American or Hispanic, however the data dated back to 2003. With a shift towards a culturally responsive education system, it is imperative to review the data in the present, to determine if such correlation still exists and how to address it.

Research Questions

This study addresses disproportionality in special education under the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Within the state of Pennsylvania, what is the representation in special education under the disability category of ED?

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Research Question 2: Within the state of Pennsylvania, what is the risk associated with being identified with ED between African American students and their White peers?

Research Question 3: Does data reflect an overrepresentation of African American students being diagnosed with ED, within special education, in the state of Pennsylvania?

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

African American students are faced with poor quality instruction, teacher bias of culture, and achievement relying greatly on standardized testing (Losen & Orfield, 2002). This increases the disproportion in special education, with African American students, under the disability category of Emotional Disturbance (ED), being overrepresented. To understand and look toward the prevention of the disparities in special education, amongst African American students, it is imperative to review the findings of literature, to combine similarities, as well as point out inconsistencies. Throughout this chapter and review of literature, several focuses emerged surrounding this topic of disparities in special education: special education diagnosis, teacher background and demographics, and the effect on student outcomes.

This chapter is broken down into two sections. The first utilizes the literature reviewed to allow for a greater understanding of ED. In addition to exploring the defining characteristics, this chapter also highlights the negative impact that may come with this diagnosis. The second section focuses on studies in which disproportionality of African American students is analyzed, and at which rate it is continuing throughout our country.

Lastly, the goal of this chapter is to take the following review of literature into consideration, along with specifics related to the reporting of special education data, amongst African American students, and determine if such inconsistencies continue to exist, specifically within the state of Pennsylvania. The sections within this review of literature will dissect the findings under the themes that have emerged.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Historical Timeline – African Americans

Slavery

Throughout history in the United States, it can be inferred that African Americans were consistently treated as the minority, although during the period of slavery, they represented most of the population. During each historical movement, came new struggles for African Americans. Slavery in America has existed as far back to the early 1500's, with the first ship from Africa carrying individuals who would go on to be used as slaves. It was estimated that between 6 and 7 million African American's were taken from their land and brought to North America, to be used as workers (Foner, 1999).

The period throughout the 1500's and into the early 1800's, was known as the *Triangle Trade*, which would give individuals the ability to earn a profit from obtaining slaves. The Triangle Trade made it accessible for the Americans to do the same. The American Slave Trade was active from 1619-1807 (Larsen, n.d.), furthermore, slavery was legalized in the United States in 1676. By the early 1700's, African American slaves surpassed the population of Whites. Attempts were made to decrease slavery on their own, which was known as the Underground Railroad, a discrete outlet for slaves to escape, became active between the years of 1831-1865 (Larsen, n.d.).

Abolition and Reconstruction

Abolition took place in 1865, following the Civil War, under the presidential leadership of Abraham Lincoln. This formal ending to slavery may have brought freedom, but injustices against African Americans would still be occurring, as the significant changes that African Americans were hoping for did not occur (Foner, 1999). The *reconstruction*, or life after slavery, brought on more challenges to African Americans. Still having to function under a series of rules

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

called, “Black Code”, these individuals were still not seen as equals, making it difficult for them to flourish in their personal and professional lives (Foner, 1999).

Continuing with their struggle, in 1896, the constitution ruled during the hearing of *Plessy v. Ferguson* that racial segregation was constitutional, under the terms “separate but equal”. However, it would not be until the monumental court hearing of *Brown v. Board of Education 1954*, in which segregation based on the color of one’s skin would be ruled unconstitutional. Unfortunately, the progress to desegregate within the public education system and additional institutions was slow, thus sparking The Civil Rights Movement (Bickel, 1998). During the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans received backlash and many African American students were faced with setbacks during the transition. It would not be until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in which desegregation was enforced, not only within the educational systems, but across other public places. Throughout this transition to equal rights, African Americans continued to be subjected to discrimination, which included accessibility to housing and means of employment (Kindig, 2007). Additionally, discrimination continued within the educational setting, specifically in the placement of students of various ethnic groups and races being excluded from general education.

IDEA and Emotional Disturbance

Historical Development of IDEA

Not only was discrimination occurring in special education for students from different ethnic backgrounds and races, but it was also determined that all students within special education were not having the accessibility to an appropriate education (Ferri & Conner, 2005). Many hearings began to occur in the 1970’s by families and advocacy organizations to contest the inconsistencies within special education (Office of Special Education Programs, 2009). This

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

resulted in the establishment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA, 1975). Under EHA, special education students would receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), which would help districts with the cost of providing supports and services to special education students.

In 1991, Congress made an amendment to the EHA, which would not only account for the change of name, from EHA to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), it would also add that students would receive written documentation under their individualized education program (IEP). The IEP is set to include, but not limited to, student present education levels of academics, goals and objectives, and accommodations (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). In addition, this would start to bridge the gap of parental involvement, another of the six principles of IDEA. Together the six principles include FAPE, IEP, appropriate evaluation, parental involvement, least restrictive environment, and procedural safeguards (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996).

However, a successful IEP relies on the willingness of the team to work together to create the document, and such involvement can vary between what is locally mandated and federally mandated (Wakelin, 2008). Through further amendments to IDEA (i.e., 1997 and 2004), the implementation continued to vary greatly amongst schools at the local level (Garda, 2004). For example, the states of California and Massachusetts require that the draft IEP be provided to the family at least five days prior to the IEP meeting, which is not a requirement under IDEA (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014). The reasoning of why it is not a requirement is due to the concept of predetermination or having a set decision of what is going into the IEP document prior to the meeting (Pfrommer, 2020). It is important to understand that not only is this process interpreted differently, but other components as well.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Emotional Disturbance

Under IDEA Section 300.8, a child with a disability can be defined as:

Child with a disability means a child evaluated in accordance with 300.304 through 300.311 as having an intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as “emotional disturbance”), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, and other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (USDOE, IDEA Regulations, §300.8).

In specific to this review of literature, ED can further be defined, again from IDEA, Section 300.8.c.4, as a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s education performance:

- a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (USDOE, IDEA Regulations, §300.8).

The definition was first created by Eli Bower, which came from his study in the 1950’s in which he examined children who were considered emotionally disturbed (Hanchon &

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Allen, 2013). This definition, under which the identification occurs for students with ED, took into consideration what Bowers stated, but deviated from the original and added the clause to not include socially maladjusted children, which also has been another controversial topic in special education (Becker et al., 2011). Moreover, the definition of ED has remained unaltered, whereas disability categories, such as Learning Disability, have been changed over five times within the document (Hanchon & Allen, 2017).

Additional inconsistencies are within the vagueness of the definition, for example the words within the definition “long period of time”, “marked degree” “satisfactory” and “inappropriate” are all terms that are open to an individual’s own interpretation (Sullivan & Sadeh, 2014). It is also stated that students who are diagnosed under the disability category of ED often have characteristics associated with conduct, attention, and function disorders (Merrell & Walker, 2004); resulting in labels such as *conduct disorder* or *co-occurrence of a disability* being used interchangeably with ED (Becker et al., 2011). This leads to the disconnect between the special education classification of ED versus the psychiatric diagnosis, often missing the mental health component (Becker et al., 2011). This discrepancy within the diagnosis of ED and the missing psychiatric component, may be due in part to a lack of standardized assessments of the five-criterion used within the classification of ED (Handwerk & Marshall, 1998).

Within ED, there are internal and external behaviors that assist in the criteria when diagnosing a child. At the forefront are the external behaviors (e.g., going against the expectations of the classroom teacher, negative interactions with peers and staff, and physical aggression), which are then in turn used primarily within the process of diagnosing a child (Reddy et al., 2009). This results in an under identification of individuals who may experience more internalizing behaviors (e.g., nervousness and/or hopelessness), and an overidentification

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

of those who exhibit more outward behaviors (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). According to the Center for Parent Information and Resources, disorders in which one can be classified as ED are as follows: anxiety, bipolar, conduct, eating disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and psychotic disorder. Where this can be problematic within the criteria is that these disorders are umbrella terms which include variations of the main heading (National Institute of Mental Health, [NIHM], 2010). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 7.1% of children aged 3-17 were formally diagnosed with anxiety disorder and 3.2% diagnosed with depression (CDC, 2021).

Specific to this study, the literature reviewed has gathered that the interpretation of the criteria for ED leaves African American youth, specifically males, more susceptible as being identified with having ED (Linton, 2015). The behaviors that may differentiate from the norm are seen as incompatible school behaviors, thus resulting in referral for special education instead of offering alternative or replacement behaviors (Linton, 2015).

In the field of special education, students who receive special education services under the category of ED is estimated to be 1% of the school population (Forness et al., 2011). For many, a disability diagnosis can mean that necessary supports and services will be put into place to help one succeed, however, these inconsistencies within the diagnosis of students, specifically under the category of ED, often result in an overrepresentation of one demographic of students being placed into the said category.

Disproportionality by Race

The timeline of special education disproportion begins with the 1968 publication by L. Dunn, which was reported as one of the earliest readings that opened this discussion. Findings from his research stated that 60-80% of the special education population under the classification

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

of Intellectual Disabilities (ID), was within the demographic of Non-White students (Dunn, 1968). Several years later, in 1973, J. Mercer began to analyze special education data at the local level, in her hometown, the state of California. Her research indicated that an overrepresentation of Non-White students was receiving special education supports under the category of MR, with African American males receiving supports at three times their school population (Mercer, 1973). Furthermore, in 1982, the first national study, which utilized data from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), added an additional category to the overrepresentation of minority students, which was that of ED (Finn, 1982).

As the national data provided by OCR updates, there is a continued pattern of disproportion in special education, primarily related to the demographic of African Americans. Data reported that this has shown to be a problem for the past three decades, where this pattern of statistics will continue to show an overrepresentation of African American students in special education classrooms, receiving support for cognitive and behavior disorders, as well as physical, visual, and speech impairments (Watkins & Kurtz, 2001).

According to USDOE, the enrollment percentage of African American students in special education is 15%. With the annual report to the Congress continuing to show African Americans making up a larger percentage across disability categories, with ED – 7.1%, ID – 6.8%, and SLD, 39.3%. According to researchers in the field, these are the disability categories in which the most children are identified with, in special education (Reid, 2015).

Concerns associated with African American students, specifically males, being overrepresented within ED, can include a stigmatization and separation, based off the label (Hart et al., 2010). When it comes to African American students, studies have shown that there is a subjective approach to behaviors, as opposed to set continuum of observed behaviors (Skiba et

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

al., 2006). Behaviors such as having an attitude, not adhering to the classroom expectations, or throwing tantrums can be viewed as more threatening when exhibited by African American students resulting in more severe consequences than their White peers exhibiting the same behaviors (Lambert et al., 2017). Furthermore, African American students are often faced with more challenges when entering school than their White peers, specifically when it comes to having to follow cultural expectations represented by White students as opposed to being able to embrace their own cultural norms (Gardner et al., 2014).

Additionally concerning are the statistics surrounding the make-up of the classroom. In 1972, the population in the classroom could be described as being 78% White students and 21% students who are Non-White (USDOE, 2005). However, classrooms in 2005 were populated with 42% of the student body being Non-White (USDOE, 2007). With the increase in Non-White students within the classroom, White teachers still account for most staff (Ford & Kea, 2009). Data within the classroom also specifies that more than a third of children in elementary and secondary grade-levels are Non-White students (Weinstein et al., 2004). But again, when looking further at the make-up of the teaching staff; teachers tend to be White, middle-class, and female (Ladson-Billings, 1997). Continued statistics to further support what the classroom *looks like*, it is reported that 92% of teachers are White and 87% are female (Snyder, 2002).

Complicating this disproportion even further, is that data indicate that many of the White teachers are also coming from White neighborhoods and have attended colleges for teacher education, in which most staff and students are White. The college courses are also not addressing the imbalance of color (Bradley et al., 2008). On the other side of the classroom, the USDOE census data report that although the general population of learners is White, Non-White

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

learners will become the numerical majority within the walls of our public schools (Aud et al., 2011).

Referrals in Special Education

For a child to qualify for special education services, they must meet certain criteria that are established through the referral process. The referral process includes screening for a special education need followed by an evaluation by the school psychologist (PDE, 2021). Referrals in special education from teachers tend to be based on the criteria of whether a student is teachable (e.g., being able to engage in learning without disruption) or is non-threatening within the classroom (Harry & Anderson, 1994). The two categories that receive much of this bias are severe ED and Mild Mental Retardation (Cummins, 1986). Coincidentally, high incidence disabilities require the most level of professional judgement and a team approach, when considering diagnosing a child under one of those disability categories (Arnold & Lassmann, 2003).

When conducting a research study about the views of educators and overrepresentation statistics amongst Non-White students, most of those teachers that were surveyed had little to no understanding of what that meant (Shippen, et al., 2009). Data also reveal that the number of teachers working in emotional support classrooms is limited, which reflects teacher shortages throughout the country (Cancio et al., 2013). Many teachers working with students who are diagnosed with ED are teachers who are not considered as highly qualified; or received an emergency certification to staff the classrooms (Sparks, 2004). Therefore, the recruitment and retention of teachers is crucial in this field (Bradley et al., 2008). In correlation with teacher demographics, a survey reported a bias when referring students to special education. Results indicated that race did become a factor, as part of the decision to refer an individual for special

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

education services (Bradley et al., 2008). Research also indicated that female teachers were more likely to refer African American males for special education (Alter et al., 2013). This bias within special education referrals tends to shift towards African American students, specifically males, as research reflects that African American males are 2.8 times more likely to be referred to for special education services than any other race and/or ethnicity (Sullivan & Bal, 2013). The bias occurs due to the so-called deficit way of thinking (McKenna, 2013). Preconceived views of African American student behaviors can influence how a teacher interprets such behaviors. Additionally, the media pushing racial stereotypes, this “acceptance” as the normal, creates unnecessary fear of African Americans (Tyson et al., 2005). This is a societal problem that has shown significance in research, that needs to be addressed, with teachers being aware of bias and providing more culturally appropriate techniques within classroom management (Woodson & Harris, n.d.). More culturally appropriate techniques are needed because teachers are dealing with culturally based behaviors (Townsend, 2000).

In the field of special education, more specifically in classrooms that serve students with ED, those students may require more intensive support, which is better implemented by highly qualified teachers who might be more competent in delivering effective instruction and managing challenging behaviors through appropriate interventions (Albrecht et al., 2012). However, in reality, it is more likely that a novice teacher (i.e., one or two years of teaching experience) will be employed working with students of a diverse background, thus causing more referrals for behavior, due to inexperience in the field (Losen et al., 2014). Unfortunately, these teachers are also not readily prepared to work with students coming from a different background due to the lack of experience and training employing appropriate intervention strategies to work with minority populations (Talbert-Johnson, 2001).

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Additionally, they may also lack an understanding of adolescent development, as middle school male students are amongst the highest population for referrals due to behavior (Losen et al., 2011). Disruptions tend to increase and/or decrease depending on the skill level of the teacher and how engaging they are with the content they are teaching to their students (Losen, 2011). There are evidence-based practices and interventions that have empirical data in support of this demographic of children, it takes teachers to provide consistency and to give their time to implement such interventional programming (Klingner et al., 2005). Teachers also need to have the knowledge of these evidence-based practices and need to be able to deliver instruction effectively (Bradley et al., 2008). When students are put into a more inclusive setting, general education teachers often struggle with appropriate behavioral/classroom management, again related to academic failure and the desire for the students with ED resorting to dropping out (Lewis, 2016). Effective classroom management has a direct relationship [positively] to improved outcomes in students, specifically those with disabilities (Green, 2010). Additionally, absent, is the ability to provide students with appropriate replacement behaviors, also contributes to classroom management and strategies that teachers lack (Ervin et al., 2016). Teachers will choose to focus on the behavior of special education students rather than academic intervention (Wehby, 2003). It is estimated that by the time students with the ED diagnosis reach high school, they will be 3.5 years behind in Reading (Coutinho, 1986).

Educators also lack multicultural competency, or what may be the culture norm to one racial group may be a different assumption from another racial group (Ford, 2012). Without understanding African American culture, it may be difficult for teachers to be able to employ effective techniques in the classroom.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

These inconsistencies occurring within the referral process and within the classroom setting, specific to race, lead to improper placement for students (Skiba et al., 2008). An improper special education placement can lead to a reduction in the quality of education that the student is receiving (Wakelin, 2008). The limitations that placement in a special education program can have been that of participation in recreational school activities, being able to take elective courses, and a detachment from the community (OSERS, 2005). While all the above contribute to the discrepancies in the referral process, it is also important to take into consideration other factors that may influence this process as well. The COVID-19 Global Pandemic is one of those factors that had an impact on education, specifically within special education.

COVID-19 Impact on Education

Further complicating phenomena's that occur in education (e.g., disproportionality in special education), we add in the impact of the global pandemic. The pandemic caused immediate shut down of school buildings in early March of 2020. The shutdown did not mean a stoppage of education, but instead, forced schools to operate remotely (Jameson et al., 2020). While no direct guidelines were in place to specify what remote learning needed to look like, the USDOE released a statement indicating that school districts still needed to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities, citing FAPE (USDOE, 2020). Unfortunately, this guidance was misinterpreted across districts, and resulted in the lack of education for students with or without a disability (Nadworny & Kamenetz, 2020). The OCR and OSERS, in conjunction with the USDOE, released additional guidance on how to support students, specifically those receiving special education services (Jameson et al., 2020).

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Throughout the pandemic and the effect on education, school psychologists were also required to shift in their way of supporting students, specifically those in special education (Reupert et al., 2021). It is estimated that school psychologists spend 50% of their job completing work associated to the eligibility and assessment of students in special education (Walcott & Hyson, 2018). During the closure of in-person education, school psychologists had to modify their capability to administer psychoeducational assessments (Reupert et al., 2021). Assessments used by school psychologists are initially created to be completed in-person, doing so virtually would negatively influence the validity of the assessment (Farmer et al., 2020). Guidance across the country was to delay initial evaluation assessments until given the greenlight to proceed with in-person means of assessing (Reupert et al., 2021).

Although the school closures would assist in containing the outbreak of COVID-19, the academic consequences were reported to result in a 9-12-month learning loss for when students returned to the brick-and-mortar way of learning (Christakis, 2020). The learning loss was a direct result of the type of education students received during the closure. The type of education being received and the equate to learning loss could be broken down by the following: students receiving good remote instruction were likely to progress once entering back into brick-and-mortar learning, students receiving lower quality remote instruction were likely to maintain their current grade level of progress, despite entering the next grade level, and lastly, those students who received poor/no remote learning instruction would have more significant learning loss with the inability to catch up to their peers (Dorn et al., 2021). Students and families who had limited accessibility to quality remote instruction would have more learning loss than individuals who had average quality and more accessibility, which could be directly related to low-income, African American and Hispanic students (Dorn et al., 2021). Additional factors that were

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

reported to have contributed to poor student outcomes during the pandemic were related to a loss of socialization, parental job loss, and friends and family members becoming ill (Blustein et al., 2020). Research also indicates that students who come from African American, Hispanic, or Native American families may be predisposed to certain factors, especially from the COVID-19 pandemic (Hoffman & Miller, 2020). Particularly, there are stressors that students were facing prior to COVID-19, then the additional stressors from the pandemic. These contribute to the disparities that already negatively influence the previously mentioned ethnic minority groups (Dorn et al., 2020).

Effect on Student Outcomes

There are many effects that a special education placement can have when it comes to student outcomes. This section refers to the accessibility of resources, disciplinary inconsistencies, and post-secondary outcomes. Each will be discussed respectively below.

Accessibility to Resources

Any student placed into special education, may end up having inaccessibility to resources, that would otherwise be afforded to students within the general education setting (Aaroe & Nelson, 2000). African American students that are placed within special education environments, specifically under the disability category of ED, tend to have inadequate services and have poor academic outcomes, in addition to social inabilities (Osher & Hanley, 2001). Most students diagnosed with ED spend most of their school day with peers also identified with ED, limiting their exposure to other peers and/or curricular activities (Henderson et al., 2005). Explaining this further, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) discusses the implications of African American students in special education and their inability to close their educational gaps, as related to their peers accessing general education, with more measures other

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

than state testing, being put into place when looking at this population (Losen, 2011).

Additionally, special education placement and its accessibility to general education curriculum is harder to obtain, but if a student is then placed in the mainstream, they can become more likely to have unfair disciplinary treatment (Sutherland et al., 2008).

Disciplinary Inconsistencies

Relating to the demographics of teaching staff, 92% White, with 87% female (Snyder, 2002), discipline of students of color, particularly African American males tends to illicit higher referrals to the office, suspension, and in some cases expulsion (Osher et al., 2000). It is estimated that 50% of students that are suspended are African American males as compared to 25% of their White peers (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). The USDOE, OCR, reported that 28% of African American males in middle school were suspended at least once, in comparison to their White peers, which was 10% of the middle school population. Although making up 17% of the school population, African American students account for 37% of suspensions and 35% of expulsions (Witt, 2007). At higher rates, students are spending more of their time outside of the school building (Skiba et al., 2008).

This subjective approach of pushing out students from the classroom to make way for “students who want to learn” (Osher et al., 2010 p. 6). Teachers will make the claim that the inconsistencies in parental involvement led to behavioral outbursts in the classroom, causing the child to be suspended; if the said dysfunction exists in the home, suspension is then causing the child to be left with that dysfunction (Losen et al., 2011). Losen (2011) goes on to say that even if a parent is involved in their child’s education, a suspension can cause disruption to the family. Parents are forced to choose taking off from work with the potential to lose income/employment, or leaving their child unattended.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Further complicating this implication, is that this poses a suspected correlation of disciplinary rates to the lower achievement scores, of students within this disability category (Annamma et al., 2014). The USDOE, OCR's national data from the 2011-12 schoolyear indicated that the suspension rate of students with disabilities was twice of their non-disabled peers, additional data referenced that 1 out of 5 suspended students were African American male students, at a rate of 20% compared to their White peers at 6% (Losen et al., 2014). Additionally, the data from this study indicated that students with ED were suspended at a higher rate than any other disability category, at 32.88%. The data also reveal that the increase in suspensions for African American students relates to the risk of being involved in the juvenile justice system.

Post-Secondary Outcomes

Previous research showed the dropout rates in students with ED are around 50% (Sullivan & Sadeh, 2016), a number that continues to increase. Post-secondary outcomes are influenced by the individual's diagnosis with ED (Wagner et al., 2005). Moreover, the challenges students with ED struggle with inside the classroom can carry over to their home environment, leading to higher dropout rates, mental health issues, and higher unemployment rates (Wagner et al., 2005). Not to mention that coming from the racial discrepancies in teachers (i.e., White female) and the students they are working with (i.e., African American males), expectations from these teachers tend to be lower (Valencia, 2010), causing these students to not participate in post-secondary meetings and being less likely to enter post-secondary education (Ford, 2011).

Additionally, the student attitudes tend to be negative when it comes to education, because of these inconsistencies (Campbell-Whatley & Comer, 2000). These students also struggle with related factors such as poverty, 29.8% amongst students with ED, and single-parent

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

households, 38.1% amongst students with ED (Wagner et al., 2005). The following further supports the connection that the disability category correlates to these additional environmental factors:

In addition to challenges posed by their disabilities, youth with ED also were more likely that both youth with disabilities as a whole and youth in the general population to be living in poverty, to be living with a single parent, and to have an unemployed head of household (Wagner et al. 2016, p. 164).

The entering of adulthood, or individuals between the ages of 18 and 25, consider this time in their life to include major “life markers” such as post-secondary education, competitive employment, living independently, and for some having a family (Grob et al., 2001). Having to encounter these parts of their life without supports that were previously provided to them in school. These services provided to students often disappears upon graduation, especially with students with ED, often results in 40% of unmet needs post high school (Wagner et al., 2016).

Statistics also show that amongst the disability category of ED that these youth who have been out of high school for 8 years or more have a higher rate of unemployment, with 6 out of 10 having been arrested (Newman et al. 2011). In addition, 40% of individuals who dropped out of school go on to not obtain a diploma or a graduate equivalency degree (GED (Bradley et al., 2008; NACTS). Nationally, “the competitive employment rate of youth with ED who had been out of high school up to 4 years still lagged significantly behind that of youth in the general population, 42.3% vs. 66.4%” (Wagner et al., 2017, p. 132). On average, the duration of jobs held since high school by students with ED was 7.6 months, compared to 14.7 of the general population (Newman et al., 2009).

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

It is estimated that 93,000 youth are incarcerated (National Juvenile Justice Network, 2009) and the number continues to reflect the disability of ED (USDOE, 2009). Additional statistics referred to 47.7% of incarcerated youth being African American males, under the disability category of ED (Quinn et al., 2005). The statistics deduce the following information: 1 in 3 black boys born in 2001 are at the risk of imprisonment during their lifetime, 5 times more than females (Children's Defense Fund, 2007). The United States continues to have the highest incarceration rate than any other country (PEW, 2008) with the representation of the population in prisons of 50% African Americans with disabilities (OSEP Programs, 2011).

From the referrals of African American students, inconsistencies within education, and the negative impact that can come from receiving a misdiagnosis or a diagnosis of ED, it is important to continue to highlight the disproportionality issue that occurs within special education across the United States. One of the ways to dissect this information is to utilize the theoretical framework of the Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Theoretical Framework

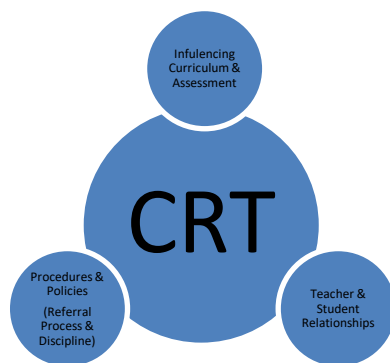
The CRT stems from the Critical Legal Studies theory, as an extension, to include the discipline of race and racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The CRT is being used within this study to help unpack challenges that African Americans may face. The CRT gained heightened attention during the Clinton administration, when Lani Guinier, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Law, wrote about 'proportional representation' within elections (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Guinier proposed a strategy aimed at the counting of minority votes (Guinier, 1991). Further attention was gained in the 1970s in which several activists wanted a better way to get the point of race and racism across, because the "traditional strategies" for civil rights were no longer effective (Delgado, 1995). While CRT provides insight to how the intersections of race

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

have a role to play within our society and in law, this theory has become embedded into other contexts, such as education. Ladson-Billings (1998), shared that the CRT in education is reflective of the accessibility to the same resources by African Americans that their White counterparts had already the ability to access. She further explained the theory within education across several categories: curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation. Additionally, within education, some use CRT's components to understand the issues of "school discipline and hierarchy, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing" (Delgado, 1995, p. 2). Furthermore, CRT was also used to dissect educational based practices, procedures used for reporting and tracking data, and expectations set forth by classroom teachers (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Also, as previously mentioned regarding disciplinary referrals, CRT can be used when teachers equate a higher number of disciplinary concerns due to a higher number of African American students (Thompson, 2004).

Figure 1.

Components of CRT & the Relationship to Education



This bias that is held by some educators towards African American students, does not stop with disciplinary inconsistencies, but rather continues within academic expectations, accessibility to curriculum and educators, and the culture that is already embedded into most

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

public schools. When African American students are held to different expectations and standards, there is often placement that is not in alignment with what the student needs (Lewis et al., 2008). Thus, bringing up the phenomenon of disproportionality within special education among African American students. In public school settings there is more of an emphasis on equality as opposed to equity. Unfortunately, schools continue to keep dated procedures, policies, and practices in place, which continue to put African American students at a disadvantage (Lynn & Parker, 2006). The CRT can be utilized in education to dive into the inconsistencies of the procedures, policies, and practices that are found in public school settings (Ladson-Billings 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Additionally, CRT can be used to assist in how to not only showcase these inconsistencies by how to change them (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Within the context of education, it is imperative that just as within CRT, we aim for transformation and change, as it relates to racial inconsistencies. Education continues to segregate students of minority, whether intentional or not. The following discusses the literature and the role that race plays as it relates to disproportionality in special education.

Empirical Literature Related to Disproportionality

Disproportionality in special education, specific to the over representation of African American students, specifically under the diagnosis of ED, has been widely discussed. This phenomenon in special education has been prominent over the last 50 years. It is important to the current study, that literature, in which disproportionality is analyzed, is also reviewed as it relates to studies within the field.

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

For an article to be included within the review of literature, there were certain conditions that needed to be met. Firstly, upon completing a search, articles were limited to those that were

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

peer-reviewed, published within the United States, and available in English. Secondly, articles needed to include a scope of disproportionality as it relates to a specific field of work (e.g., education and special education). Thirdly, articles had to address working with the population of children in a K-12 school setting, related to the age of 6-21. Lastly, the scope of children was specific to a special education diagnosis of ED. In contrast, articles that did not meet the initial inclusion criteria were excluded. An additional reason for excluding an article from this review were those that included data, that although may have been published in the United States, included data from outside of the United States.

Search Strategy

There were several different search strategies employed to create a collection of articles applicable to this review of literature. First, the following search string was utilized across databases to ensure that the scope of the topic was adequately addressed:

(“disproportionality in special education*” OR “studies of disproportionality in special education*” OR “disproportionality in special education of African American students”)

Second, four electronic databases were searched, 2018-2021: ERIC, APA PsychINFO, JSTOR, and Academic Search Elite. The search was also narrowed down utilizing the date range of 1968-2021. The year of 1968 was chosen, as this noted as the earliest occurrence of disproportionality as it relates to the field of special education (Dunn, 1968) and the ending date of 2021 was chosen to represent up-to-date information relevant to the topic. Next, articles were screened based on a skimming of the title and abstract. Articles that were immediately excluded were that of 1) outside of U.S. publication, 2) specific diagnosis unrelated to ED 3) unidentifiable to the field of education 4) no indication of data reflecting disproportionality within the United States.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Results

Studies in which disproportionality is examined, are done so with a risk ratio analysis of data, which takes variables such as race and gender, and the influence it may have on the identification of students within special education (Ahram et al., 2011). Due to the wide-ranging diversity across the United States, the studies conducted on disproportionality tend to be specific by state and region (Parish, 2002). For example, the New York Department of Education conducted a disproportionality project that spanned across 2004-2009. The study focused on two school districts across the state, which were multiracial and within suburban communities (Ahram et al., 2011). Participants of the study included both teachers and administrators. Not only did the study focus on disproportionality, but also tied together the cultural discrepancies that were a contributing factor to identification. Results from this study concluded that there is 1) cultural deficient thinking as it relates to teacher opinion of student achievement 2) limited resources in place for students who have academic/behavior challenges and 3) that while some things are put into place, the misconceptions of students from various cultures are still engrained into teacher beliefs of those students (Ahram et al., 2011). Culture as it relates to disproportionality, was notably examined by Skiba (2006), yielding the same findings.

According to Sullivan and Bal (2013), while disproportionality has long been a debate within the area of special education, the amount of research that discusses why this continues to occur is limited. The study conducted examined the risk of being identified with a disability as related to individual and school related variables. The selection included secondary data of 18,000 students from urban K-12 schools in the Midwest, under seven different disability categories. Patterns and predictors were also used, again to determine such contributions on special education diagnosis, possibly contributing to an overrepresentation and/or

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

disproportionality. Student predictors used were that of race, language, parent education level, special education diagnosis, age, attendance, and suspension. The factors related to the school setting were as follows: total enrollment, percentage racial/minority enrollment, percent of White teachers, retention and suspension rate, and the percentage passing Reading and Math. Of the student and school predictors, similarly to those within the previous study, the student factor of race yielded the largest identifier as a factor of being identified within special education. Results also concluded that of the predicting variables, that students from racial minorities (e.g., African American students) were amongst the risk of being identified within the high-incident disability categories, compared to White students who were more likely to be identified in low-incident disability categories.

An additional study, Annamma et al. (2014), utilized secondary data from the state of Colorado and in comparison to national data, to analyze disproportionality as it relates to achievement, discipline, special education services, and lastly the school-to-prison pipeline. Of the databases explored, the following results were obtained as they related to the above criteria. Similarly, to national patterns that expose disproportionality, it was concluded that in the state of Colorado, there is an overrepresentation of African American students within special education and within discipline. Students in Colorado are identified within special education at 10% of the total population, however this number is significantly different for African American students, which was closer to 13% of the population. In the area of discipline, African American males were more likely to be suspended at 23%, compared to the suspension rate of their White peers at 9%. Additional data also showed that youth in Colorado are subject to incarceration at a rate of 0.29%, whereas African American youth are incarcerated at a rate of 1.20%. Again, the data from this study indicate that within the state of Colorado there is an overrepresentation not only

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

within special education and related services, but also within disciplinary actions, which can then result in youth incarceration.

In addition of the review of studies, relative to disproportionality by state, additional themes emerged as factors relating to this trend in special education, as previously discussed in the overview of this section. Notably those themes were within the referral process for special education services, cultural differences within the classroom, and disciplinary inconsistencies. In 2016, it was estimated that students of color would account for 56% of the student population (USDOE, 2016). With the increase in African American students within the classroom, White teachers still account for most staff (Ford & Kea, 2009). In the most recent USDOE, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), 82% of the teaching staff identified as White (USDOE, 2016). Data within the classroom also specifies that more than a third of children in elementary and secondary grade-levels are students of color (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004). But again, when looking further at the make-up of the teaching staff; teachers tend to be White, middle-class, and female (Ladson-Billings, 1997; USDOE, 1998). Complicating this disproportion even further, is that data indicates that many of the White teachers are also coming from White neighborhoods and have attended colleges for teacher education, in which most staff and students are White. The college courses are also not addressing the imbalance of color (Bradley et al., 2006). On the other side of the classroom, the USDOE census data report that minority students are becoming the numerical majority within the walls of our public schools (Aud et al., 2011).

Summary

It is clear from the research reviewed, that disproportionality within special education and the overrepresentation of African American students under this disability category of ED is still a

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

great phenomenon that is occurring. It is also clear, in the field of special education, that African American children are more likely to be referred and diagnosed under ED, receive more disciplinary actions, and have widened gaps of achievement than their White counterparts, more than any other disability category.

Within special education diagnosis there was a consistency in data that showed a subjective approach when it came to teachers and administrators referring a child for special education services, under the disability category of ED. When conducting a research study about the views of educators and overrepresentation statistics amongst minority students, most of those teachers that were surveyed had little to no understanding of what that meant (Shippen et al., 2009). Not to mention that teachers in emotional support classrooms are few and far between, making up most teacher shortages throughout the country (Cancio et al., 2013). Therefore, the recruitment and retention of teachers is crucial in this field of special education (Bradley et al., 2008). In correlation with teacher demographics, a survey reported a bias when referring students to special education. Results indicated that race did play a factor, as part of the decision to refer an individual for special education services (Bradley et al., 2008). Research also indicated that female teachers were more likely to refer African American males for special education services (Alter et al., 2013). This is a social problem that has shown significance in research, that needs to be addressed, with teachers being aware of bias and providing more culturally appropriate techniques within classroom management (Woodson & Harris, n.d.). Significant findings also included that minority populations (i.e., Non-White) were being referred and/or diagnosed twice, and sometimes three times more than White students.

The direction of the research in this current study is to dissect the special education data, specific to the state of Pennsylvania, where a higher population of African American students are

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

represented in special education, despite most White learners. Additionally, the secondary data will be used to determine if African American students have an overrepresentation within special education, specifically under the category of ED. The projected results of this study aim to gain a better understanding of this issue and offer some recommendation towards the prevention within the disparities that continue to occur in special education and how future educators can be more prepared prior to their start in the classroom setting. The aim is to better educate future teachers of what may be a realistic problem they could face within their own classroom and how to deter this imbalance from continuing to occur.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

Within this chapter, the quantitative procedures will be identified and discussed as it pertains to the current study. Disparities in special education have spanned the country over the last four decades. The duty of this research is to analyze data set forth by PDE, to bring awareness that disproportionality may continue to be a problem, specifically within our state. This study specifically focuses on such disparities that occur in special education, related to the overrepresentation of African American students under the disability category of ED. In addition, the research plan, including the methodology, participants as related to the data being analyzed, and the method of analysis, are also parts of what will be addressed within this chapter.

It is critical to note that within this study, the researcher is using the categorical norms as related to race and ethnicity, however research has noted problems associated with such categories. In an article discussing the family structure with African American men, Zuberi (1998) highlighted what occurs when racial populations become socially defined in an already existing society. He went on to define assimilation and racial stratification as the following:

Assimilation is the gradual process in which one set of cultural traits and historical genealogy is relinquished in the dominant mainstream culture. Racial stratification is the process of using race as a factor in the allocation of resources and power in a society (Zuberi, 1998, p. 10).

This is important as it related to European American descendants making up majority of the society and anything other than European American was considered nonstandard (e.g., non-European American behavior). Further addressing the problems within racial categories, Zuberi

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

again addressed this topic within his book *Thicker than Blood*. Relative to this area of research, he addressed that racial categorization is equating race to a status (2001). Furthermore, he addressed that race is treated as a hierarchy of class dominance, rather than a demographic identifier (Zuberi, 2001). Within this study, the researcher acknowledges that utilizing race as a categorical variable comes with limitations which will be later discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Research Question(s)

The questions proposed for this study are tied to the implications that such disparities continue to exist across the country, also exist within the state of Pennsylvania.

Research Question 1: Within the state of Pennsylvania, what is the representation in special education under the disability category of ED?

Research Question 2: Within the state of Pennsylvania, what is the risk associated with being identified with ED between African American students and their White peers?

Research Question 3: Does data reflect an overrepresentation of African American students being diagnosed with ED, within special education, in the state of Pennsylvania?

It is hypothesized that data spans this last decade (i.e., 2011-2021) continue to show a disparity within special education, specifically with African American students, being overrepresented under the disability category of ED, than their White peers, within the state of Pennsylvania. Furthermore, it is also hypothesized that African American students are referred to special education at a higher rate than their White peers.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Data Source

The data collected within this study are secondary data from the PDE, Bureau of Special Education. Under IDEA, along with Chapter 14 and Chapter 15 of the State Board Regulations, supervision is provided of buildings where these services are being implemented, to ensure that students with disabilities are receiving the appropriate supports and services as outlined (PDE, 2019). In addition, under the regulations of IDEA – Section 618, states, “that each state submit data about the infants and toddlers, birth through age 2, who receive early intervention services under Part C of *IDEA* and children with disabilities, ages 3 through 21, who receive special education and related services under Part B of *IDEA*.” (USDOE, IDEA, § 618). Within the state of Pennsylvania, this child count report is received the first week of December, and data are compiled for access via the PDE, Penn Data Reporting website (penndata.hbg.psu.edu). An additional data set being used is the Enrollment Report and Projections Count, which can be found on the PDE website, under the heading Data and Reporting (or: education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting).

Additionally, the data collected were separated by pre-COVID years and post-COVID years. The impact that COVID-19 had on the educational system consisted of the immediate shut down of school buildings during the Spring semester of the 2019-2020 school year, and for school districts to enforce a virtual or hybrid model of learning for the 2020-2021 school year. It is important within this educational area of research to include such information that may have an impact on the study results.

Participants and Setting

The participants within this research study were that of a larger sample of data, as reported from 29 Intermediate Units (IU) across the state of Pennsylvania. Of the 29 IU's, 648

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

educational programs (e.g., public-school districts, charter schools, approved private facilities) provided data of students receiving special education services. Over the last decade, the average amount of students receiving special education services was that of 276,802.

Table 1

Number of Students Receiving Special Education Services in PA by Year

2011-2012	262,241
2012-2013	262,461
2013-2014	263,785
2014-2015	265,548
2015-2016	270,611
2016-2017	277,379
2017-2018	284,477
2018-2019	290,896
2019-2020	308,750
2020-2021	308,760

Several additional demographics were collected from the data report, which included a breakdown of students by disability category and the breakdown of students by race/ethnicity. The following disability categories were included in the reports: Autism, Deaf-Blindness, ED, Hearing Impairment Including Deafness, ID, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, OHI, SLD, Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Visual Impairment Including Blindness. Specific to this study, the researcher was interested in the reporting of the disability category of ED. In the area of race/ethnicity, the following groups were represented:

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, Multiracial, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Island, and White. Again, specific to this study the researcher was interested in the data related to Black or African American and White. Demographics related to gender were not included in the reporting of data.

Other data within the report, due to the standards of reporting, were that of grade level of students receiving services under special education. As previously mentioned, reporting under IDEA Section 618 is to include children that are between the ages of 2-21. Within this study, the researcher utilized data involving school-aged children as reported by the age range of 6-21.

Research Design

This study will follow a descriptive and association quantitative research design through the analysis of secondary data in isolation. Secondary data can be defined as data that were collected by another individual, other than that of the current researcher (Sloboda, 2016). The external, secondary data were obtained from the government website for PDE. Quantitative research can be described as a way of collecting and analyzing numerical data that explains the way variables are connected (Gay et al., 2009). Quantified data were given numerical value through the analysis process. This study aims to describe the relationship of variables as they relate to the research question of disproportionality and disparities that exist in special education, specific to the state of Pennsylvania.

Variables

Within this study the key variables include that of disability category, race/ethnicity, and disproportionality rate. The disability categories were taken directly from the PDE, Bureau of Special Education, Penn Data Reporting, which consisted of 11 of 13 of the disability categories represented under IDEA. The disability categories include are Autism, Deaf-Blindness, ED,

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Hearing Impairment Including Deafness, ID, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, OHI, SLD, Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Visual Impairment Including Blindness. Within this research study, the variable of ED is of interest to the researcher.

The independent variable within this study is that of race/ethnicity provided by the state using the secondary data set. The secondary data set being utilized listed the following under race/ethnicity: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, Multiracial, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White. Broken down, specific to the interest of the researcher, are individuals who fall into the race/ethnicity of Black or African American and White.

Across this study, the dependent variable, is the frequency within special education vs. general education or the disproportionality rate. This is calculated across each of the 29 intermediate units, consisting of 648 total districts providing services for special education. Measures of the variable will be addressed via the data analysis being ran for each of the research questions.

Materials

The goal of the Special Education Data Reports (SEDR) from the PDE, Bureau of Special Education, are to ensure that the law is being followed regarding special education services, as outlined in IDEA Section 618. Under the SEDR, there are 14 indicators that are evaluated at the state level, per the reporting done within each school district. The indicators are as follows: Graduation Rate, Drop-Out Rate, Participation and Performance in Statewide Assessments, Discrepancy in Suspension and Expulsion Rates, Educational Environment, School Facilitated Parent Involvement, Disproportionate Representation by Race/Ethnicity,

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Disproportionate Representation by Disability Category, Timelines for Initial Evaluations, IEP Post-Secondary Transition Goals, and Post-School Outcomes. An additional set of data is compiled into the Child Count Report, which breaks down the data by enrollment, disability, and race/ethnicity. Also, in order to obtain the total general education population as it relates to students being identified for special education services, the Public-School Enrollment Data, provided by PDE, will also be utilized.

For this study, using the SEDR and the Child Count report, data were taken from the 29 Intermediate Units (IU) across 648 school districts or providing educational buildings. The data spanned across a decade of school years beginning with the 2011-2012 schoolyear and ending with the 2020-2021 schoolyear. The data used within this study are compiled by the Local Educational Agencies (LEA) in conjunction with the Director of Special Education, per school district or providing educational building. The report is then sent to the PDE in which it is placed into charts and reports are ran specific to the data being reported. The accessibility of this data can be found at <https://penndata.hbg.psu.edu> under the heading Annual Federal Data Reports, Table 1 – Child Count, Section E for years 2011-2012; 2012-2013; 2013-2014 and Section D for consecutive years following.

Procedures

The researcher accessed the PennData website through the PDE, Bureau of Special Education. Once at the homepage, the researcher clicked the Annual Federal Data Reports Tab. Under this tab, the researcher obtained the report for Table 1 – Child Count, for the years 2011-2012, and each consecutive year up and including the 2020-2021 schoolyear. Within the Child Count PDF document, the researcher obtained the information contained in Section E: Race/Ethnicity by Disability of Children Ages 6-21 Receiving Special Education or Section D.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Distribution of Children with Disabilities (IDEA) ages 6-12 receiving special education by district Race/Ethnicity and disability. The researcher utilized a self-created table to document and track total number of students receiving special education services, total number of students identified as ED, and further, how many students are identified based on race, specifically White and African American.

Additionally, the researcher accessed the Public-School Enrollment Data provided by the PDE to achieve a total general education population. The data in the current format (e.g., an excel spreadsheet) contain raw data, which needed to be aggregated, correlated, and summarized, to be utilized by this study. The data obtained after aggregation were used in relation of the total number of students in the general education population and the rate at which they are being placed into special education.

Interobserver Agreement (IOA)

Interobserver Agreement (IOA) can be defined as “a method for assessing the reliability and validity of observational data” (Watkins & Pacheco, 2000, p. 206). The IOA can be assessed utilizing percent agreement or kappa (Watkins & Pacheco, 2000). Within this study, a colleague of the researcher, Vashawn Patrick B. Eng, also reviewed the data as a secondary observer. There was a comparison of results from both observers. Percent agreement was utilized to determine the number of occurrences in which the data yielded the same results. To obtain the percentage of IOA, the number of agreements and disagreements was calculated and multiplied by 100 (Watkins & Pacheco, 2000).

Data Analysis

The research questions within this study were answered by comparing the disproportionality rates using risk analysis; additionally, the E-formula for determining

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

significant disproportionality will also be used (Bal et al., 2017). The E-Formula was introduced in the 1970's due to a court hearing that took place in California. The Larry P. vs. Riles case brought attention to a concern that African American students were being identified as having ID (previously named Educable Mental Retardation) and placed in special education settings higher than being placed into the general education population. The result ended in a settlement which included that the California Department of Education (CDE) monitor disproportionate placement as it relates to African American students. (Garcia, 2015). The E-Formula is as follows:

$$E = A + \sqrt{A \times \frac{100 - A}{N}}$$

In detail for calculating the E-Formula, a researcher is determining the upper bound or expected composition of a racial group regarding disability category, which is identified in the formula as E . The other component within the formula is A , which is the composition of students in a specific racial group. Calculations for finding A are discussed further in Chapter 4. Lastly, N represents the total number of students enrolled in the disability category being examined (e.g., ED). Again, the calculations for the E-Formula are further explained within Chapter 4.

Within the area of special education, there are three data tools used to determine the risk of disproportionality: Risk Index, Relative Risk Ratio, Composition Index. The risk index can be defined as the percentage of a specific racial group within special education (Gibb & Skiba, 2008). For example, the risk index of Latino students within special education may be that of 6% (Gibb & Skiba, 2008). Alone, the risk index may not be as meaningful, but rather used in conjunction with the relative risk ratio. The relative risk ratio compares the risk of one group, versus the risk of another group within the data being examined (Bollmer et al., 2007). The results of this calculation determine the likelihood that a particular racial group would be

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

identified in special education. Lastly, the composite index identifies the proportion of students who fall into a specific category, again classified by race. An example of composition index would be that African American students represent 25% of all students within special education (Gibb & Skiba, 2008). It should also be noted that specific formulas are used to calculate each of the factors, which are discussed as they pertained to this study, in Chapter 4.

This study focuses on African American students with disabilities as compared to their White peers, therefore the researcher used the risk analysis (e.g., calculating risk index and risk ratio) to assist in analyzing the data. Within the risk analysis, the researcher must first compute the risk ratio within the study, while the risk ratio is determined through calculation of the risk index (Bollmer et al., 2007). The risk index can be calculated through the percentage of a specific group (e.g., African American students) within a certain category (e.g., ED) and that representation compared to other groups (e.g., White peers) (Bal et al., 2017). This information is used to depict the level of overrepresentation, but not to conclude that it is present. The formula to conduct risk ratio is as follows: $(n2/n1)/(n4/n3)$. Within the formula, n1 labels the ethnic group population for risk (e.g., African American students' total population), n2 labels the ethnic group within a specific disability category (e.g., African American students within ED), n3 is the total population of the comparison ethnic group (e.g., White students' total population), and lastly n4 labels the comparison ethnic group within the same disability category identified in n2 (e.g., White students within ED) (Bollmer et al., 2007).

Table 2

Research Questions and Design

<u>Research Question 1</u> : Within the state of Pennsylvania, what is the representation in special education under the disability category of ED?	<u>Research Design</u> – Excel Descriptive The researcher accessed the Penn Data reporting website for the dates ranging from the 2011-2012
---	--

schoolyear through the 2020-2021 schoolyear. Upon accessing the website, the researcher accessed the Child Count under the Annual Federal Data Reports tab. *Within Section E or D of the PDF Document, the researcher obtained the information across each disability category.*

Research Question 2: Within the state of Pennsylvania, what is the risk associated with being identified with ED between African American students and their White peers?

Research Design- Risk Composition

The researcher accessed the Penn Data reporting website for the dates ranging from the 2011-2012 schoolyear through the 2020-2021 schoolyear. Upon accessing the website, the researcher accessed the Child Count under the Annual Federal Data Reports tab. *Within Section E of the PDF Document, the researcher obtained the information for race for the disability category of Emotional Disturbance.*

Research Question 3: Does data reflect an overrepresentation of African American students being diagnosed with ED, within special education, in the state of Pennsylvania?

Research Design – E-Formula

The researcher utilized the numbers from the first two research questions. The researcher obtained a percentage utilizing the component of race as an identifier to determine if a correlation exists. This was computed for each schoolyear, beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, and ending with the 2020-2021 schoolyear.

Validity and Reliability

Within this area of research, there are several threats to validity. Using this secondary data set, the following threats relate to internal validity may present 1) subjects within the selection; and 2) history of the data set. Within the internal validity of subject selection, there are exclusions within the data being used. For example, pertaining to students in PK-5, data that represented students outside of the disability category of ED, and aside from research question number one, data that reflected other racial categories other than Black or African American and White were excluded. The second compromise is the history of the data. By utilizing data that

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

spans across a decade, reporting may not be as accurate or consistent each year the reporting is taken place. To combat these threats of internal validity, the researcher only uses the data as they are reported according to PDE. The researcher also enlisted in a colleague to ensure that the data were entered how they were reported. No external threats to validity are reported.

In addition to the above threats to validity, there is also a threat towards reliability. Within this data set, the threat to reliability falls into the variability of the data set, namely regarding the identification of students within special education. Due to inconsistencies within the referral process, data may reflect not only students that were inappropriately placed into special education, but also students that may not have been placed accordingly into the right special education service. The researcher acknowledges this threat to reliability in the discussion (i.e., Chapter 5), which offers measures that can be taken in the future when utilizing this secondary data set.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was to explain the methods under which the research questions were analyzed. The use of secondary data in isolation via PDE, was aggregated to obtain a clear data set. The way the researcher aggregated data was to compile and summarize existing data sets pertaining to the research questions (the Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). Within this study, data needed to be compiled into years, general education enrollment, special education enrollment, and by disability category. The data aggregated were focused on specific demographics as related to race and specific disability categories. Descriptive statistics, risk ratio, and the E-Formula were used to determine the level of overrepresentation as it may or may not exist in the state of Pennsylvania.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Overview

This study was completed to determine if the state of Pennsylvania contributes to the ongoing trend of disproportionalities in special education, particularly that of overrepresentation of African American students diagnosed with ED. Within this chapter, the results are presented utilizing risk composition and the E-Formula for overrepresentation. A recap of the results shows that African American students account for 15% of the general education population with 25% being diagnosed with ED within special education. White students made up 67% of the general education population accounting for 60% of all students with the diagnosis of ED within special education. Regarding risk, African American students are approximately two times more likely to be diagnosed with ED than their White peers. Lastly, the results of the E-Formula show a discrepancy of the expected number of African American students being diagnosed with ED, compared to the actual number is significantly greater than the expected or anticipated number. These results backed the researcher's hypothesis that within the state of Pennsylvania, overrepresentation of African American students does exist under the disability category of ED. More detailed results are presented in the following section.

Emotional Disturbance Racial Percentage

The data supplied by the Pennsylvania Department of Special Education, Report of Children with Disabilities Receiving Special Education Part B, were compiled into an Excel document and percentages of enrollment were calculated. Results yielded that White students make up approximately 60% of all students diagnosed with ED, African American students account for 25%, with other notable mentions of Hispanic students making up 9%, and students

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

who identified as having two or more races, making up 4% of the diagnosis. Table 3 refers to the data collected throughout the last decade regarding the make-up of students by race, within the category of ED. Based off the results it is also noted that African American students had a 1% decrease within the disability category of ED with an overall 5% decrease in general education enrollment. Comparably, White students had an 8% decrease within the disability category of ED with an overall 14% decrease in general education enrollment.

Table 3

Special Education Enrollment Percentage by Race

Race/Ethnicity	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Hispanic/Latin	8	8	9	10	10	10	10	11	11	12
o American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asian	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Black or African American	26	26	26	25	25	25	25	25	24	25
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
White	64	63	61	61	60	59	59	58	57	56
Two or More Races	1	2	3	4	4	5	5	6	6	6

Risk Composition

Risk in its simplest form is used to determine the likelihood of an occurrence (Data Accountability Center [DAC], 2011). Within this study, the second research question states: Within the state of Pennsylvania, what is the risk associated with being identified with ED between African American students and their White peers? This research question was answered utilizing the following risk composition.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Number of Black Students (ED)}}{\text{Total Population of Black Students}} \times 100$$

There were specific procedures used to complete the risk for African American students, and the likelihood of being identified as having ED, compared to their White peers. These procedures are outlined in Figure 2 using data from the school year 2011-2012 as an example, with the remaining years outlined in Table 4.

Figure 2.

Procedures to Calculate Risk

Step 1: Calculate the Risk for Black Students Identified with Emotional Disturbance (ED)

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Number of Black Students (ED)}}{\text{Total Population of Black Students}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{6059}{246,162} \times 100$$

$$\text{Risk} = 2.46138\%$$

Step 2: Calculate the Risk for White Students Identified with Emotional Disturbance

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Number of White Students (ED)}}{\text{Total Population of White Students}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{14,773}{1,156,078} \times 100$$

$$\text{Risk} = 1.27785\%$$

Step 3: Calculate the Level of Risk for Black Students Identified with Emotional Disturbance

$$\text{Risk of Identification} = \frac{\text{Risk of Black Students (ED)}}{\text{Risk of White Students (ED)}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Risk of Identification} = \frac{2.46138}{1.27785}$$

$$\text{Risk of Identification} = 1.92618\%$$

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Table 4

African American Students Likelihood of Risk

School Year	Risk for Identification
2011 – 2012	1.92
2012 – 2013	1.94
2013 – 2014	1.93
2014 – 2015	1.90
2015 – 2016	1.88
2016 – 2017	1.94
2017 – 2018	1.97
2018 – 2019	1.87
2019 – 2020	1.86
2020 – 2021	1.89

The results show that African American students are two times more likely to be identified within special education under the disability category of ED, compared to White students. Also, the special education enrollment of White students compared to African American students is four times greater.

E-Formula for Overrepresentation

The DAC released a guide, in conjunction with the USDOE, to assist states in describing various methods for calculating disproportionate representation. According to the DAC, the E-Formula is used to create what is known as *upper bounds* for overrepresentation and *lower bounds* for underrepresentation (DAC, 2011). Upon the calculation of the upper and lower bounds, the racial composite within the specified disability category is also calculated and the results are compared to the bounds to determine if overrepresentation or underrepresentation is present (DAC, 2011).

Within this study, research question three is stated: Does data reflect an overrepresentation of African American students being diagnosed with ED, within special education, in the state of Pennsylvania? Therefore, regarding the E-Formula, upper bounds for

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

overrepresentation were calculated as well as composite for the disability category of ED, for African American students.

Figure 3.

Procedures for Calculating the E-Formula (2011-2012)

$$E = A + \sqrt{A \times \frac{100 - A}{N}}$$

E = Upper Bound Composition

A = Enrollment Composition

N = Total # of Students Enrolled in Special Education in a Particular Disability Category

Step 1: Calculating Composition (Emotional Disturbance ED)

$$ED \text{ Composition} = \frac{\text{Black Students Enrolled in ED}}{\text{All Students Enrolled in ED}} \times 100$$

$$ED \text{ Composition} = \frac{6059}{23,068} \times 100$$

$$ED \text{ Composition} = 26.26582\%$$

Step 2: Finding Enrollment Composition (A)

$$A = \frac{\text{Enrolled Black Students}}{\text{All Enrolled Students}} \times 100$$

$$A = \frac{246,162}{1,623,424} \times 100$$

$$A = 15.16313$$

Step 3: Calculating the E-Formula for Overrepresentation

$$E = A + \sqrt{A \times \frac{100 - A}{N}}$$

$$E = 15.16313 + \sqrt{15.16313 \times \frac{100 - 15.16313}{23,068}}$$

$$E = 15.39927\%$$

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Table 5

E-Formula for Overrepresentation in ED (Expected Enrollment v. Actual Enrollment)

School Year	Expected Enrollment (%)	Actual Enrollment (%)
2011 – 2012	15.40	26.26
2012 – 2013	15.22	26.10
2013 – 2014	15.23	25.60
2014 – 2015	15.10	25.10
2015 – 2016	15.03	24.90
2016 – 2017	14.97	25.30
2017 – 2018	14.90	24.71
2018 – 2019	14.92	24.53
2019 – 2020	14.90	24.42
2020 – 2021	14.97	24.90

The results from the E-Formula indicate that the percentage of African American students receiving special education services under the disability category of ED is above the upper bound of what is expected given the percentage of the enrolled students who are African American.

This is an indicator of African American students being overrepresented amongst the disability category of ED within special education.

Interobserver Agreement (IOA)

IOA as previously stated can be calculated by taking the number of agreements and disagreements to obtain a percentage. A secondary colleague reviewed the data, and results were compared. Percent agreement was utilized to determine the number of occurrences in which the data yielded the same results. This number of agreements and disagreements were calculated and turned to a percentage. Out of the fifty-seven (57) calculations, there were fifty-five (55) agreements and two (2) disagreements. The IOA score was 96%.

Summary

The data presented in this chapter showed the percentage of students who are diagnosed under the disability category of ED according to race. Additionally, within this chapter, the calculations

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

of risk composition for African American students diagnosed with ED and the E-Formula for overrepresentation were also presented. Additional analysis of results under the research questions, will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Overview

This study was conducted to examine the phenomenon of overrepresentation within special education, specifically under the disability category of ED regarding African American students. As previously discussed, overrepresentation within special education spans across the last five decades, most notably beginning with the work of Dunn (1968). Research through the years (Artiles et al., 2004); Donovan & Cross, 2002; Ford & Kia, 2009; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Skiba, 2008; Sullivan & Bal, 2013), discuss the continued findings of this occurrence in special education, producing similar results of overrepresentation. This current study provides more insight into overrepresentation over the last decade (2011-2021). Findings of this study are based on the following research questions.

Research Question 1: Within the state of Pennsylvania, what is the representation in special education under the disability category of ED?

Research Question 2: Within the state of Pennsylvania, what is the risk associated with being identified with ED between African American students and their White peers?

Research Question 3: Does data reflect an overrepresentation of African American students being diagnosed with ED, within special education, in the state of Pennsylvania?

This chapter also considers the findings under previously reviewed literature; implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Summary of Results

The following are a summary of the results of the study, as related to each research question restated above. Regarding RQ1, the representation in special education is as follows: White students account for approximately 60% of students diagnosed with ED, African American students account for 25%, with other notable mentions of Hispanic students making up 9%, and students who identified as having two or more races, making up 4% of the diagnosis. While the data does show most students that are diagnosed with ED fall into the racial category of White; it is the comparison to the total population of White students, in which those totals would be expected. This overrepresentation is discussed further from the analysis for RQ3.

To answer RQ2, the data revealed that African American students are two times more likely to be diagnosed under the disability category of ED. This is in comparison again in relation to the overall student population. White students making up a majority, still do not equate for the percentage of students to be diagnosed at a higher rate within this disability category.

Lastly, in RQ3, it was determined through state level calculations, that there is an overrepresentation of African American students diagnosed with ED in the state of Pennsylvania. This data correlates to the E-Formula as expressed in Chapter 4. When comparing the number of students from RQ1 to the total population, that is where the over- and/or under-representation is slated to occur. This research question utilized African American students diagnosed with ED compared to all students diagnosed with ED. From that calculation, the comparison was then made with all enrolled African American students compared to all students enrolled (e.g., general population). Utilizing both the calculation made from ED composition and that of enrollment composition, the numbers given are what is expected v. what is happening. Across the state of

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Pennsylvania as a whole, the expectation is that African American students would have an average of 15% make-up within ED, when the actual number averaged 26%. When the actual number is above the expected number, that is when one can conclude that an overrepresentation is occurring.

Relevancy – Critical Race Theory

This study utilized the theoretical framework of the CRT as it relates to racial implications within education. The CRT, while an involved framework, can be simply defined that superior race say that it is a societal norm for one to hold a bias against a specific race, often sweeping racism under the rug (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Due to the nature of this study focusing on African American students and their overrepresentation in special education, it was imperative to use the lens of CRT. A previous review of literature showed that teachers who were surveyed reported a bias when referring students to special education (Guerrero et al, 2011; Klinger et al., 2005; Skiba et al., 2002). These results indicated that race was in the decision to refer an individual for special education services (Bradley et al., 2008). Although this study did not specifically consider teacher demographics, an earlier survey of Pennsylvania teachers, resulted in only 5.6% of teachers being people-of-color with an additional statistic of teachers being 73% female (Research for Action, 2018). Given the results of this study confirming an overrepresentation, and previous literature reflecting bias, one can make the connection that demographics is reflective within the results. Findings from literature reviewed also mentioned that teachers surveyed did not understand overrepresentation and/or that it is nonexistent within their setting (Shippen et al., 2009). The importance of making this connection, is due to the long-term effect that this could have on African American students. Not only are African American students being referred to for special education services based on a bias, but they are

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

also more likely to be referred for disciplinary action (Mallett, 2017). Consistent referrals for discipline can lead students down the path to what is known as the School-to-Prison Pipeline. Around 700,000 youth (under the age of 18) are processed to some extent through the juvenile justice system (Sawyer, 2019). Additionally, with 14% of youth under the age of 18 in the United States are African American, 42% of boys and 35% of girls in juvenile facilities are African American (Sawyer, 2019). Additionally, as previously reviewed, Annamma (2014) utilized secondary data from the state of Colorado to determine if disproportionate representation was existing within the state. The findings revealed that overrepresentation of African American students was presented, and the same students were being referred for discipline at a higher rate.

These statistics again continue to show disparity by race, which in turn makes viewing educational practices under the lens of CRT more applicable in the push of inclusiveness in schools. Additionally, this study reviewed ED as a disability category and the relationship to the disproportionate representation in special education. It has been over 50 years since the 1968 publication of L. Dunn (1968)'s research that was notable for bringing to the forefront that an over or under representation in special education exists based on race. However, while existing studies continue to show such disproportionate representation, there is not much that has been done to elicit change (Tefera & Fischman, 2020).

Relevancy - Equity in IDEA

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent, across the state of Pennsylvania (not just by district) if an overrepresentation of African American students is evident. Under IDEA, Section 618d, every state must develop a State Performance Plan, which is based on several indicators of compliance regarding special education services. Indicators include graduation rates, dropout rates, student participation and performance on state tests,

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

suspension and expulsion rates, educational placement, parental involvement, disproportion by race, disproportion by race and disability category, timelines, transition, and postsecondary outcomes (PDE, 2021). Specific to this study, the indicators of disproportion as related to race and disability category were addressed. Additionally, the State Performance Plan must also outline goals and additional steps necessary, if determined by the Local Education Agencies (LEAs), that there is disproportionate representation amongst identification, placement, and discipline. It should be noted that states are examining if there is disproportionate representation, however the requirement for significant disproportionality is slightly different, as discussed below.

The guidance for districts regarding significant disproportionality, which was proposed in 2016 under former president Obama's Equity in IDEA regulation, places a standardization on the process for determining disproportionality. The Equity in IDEA was meant to offer a standard measurement in which all states would use to calculate significant disproportionality within their districts (National Center for Learning Disabilities, [NCLD], 2020). This regulation was set to take effect in July of 2018. Through the change of office, under the former U.S. Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, the Equity in IDEA was put on a two-year delay. The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) went to court against the decision to delay the regulations of Equity in IDEA. In March of 2019, the decision to delay was overturned and Equity in IDEA was effective immediately. This has caused an effect on the 2018-2019 reporting years and beyond, which now has states using a standard form of methodology (e.g., risk ratio). While this was a stride made in calculating significant disproportionality, states are still able to determine their threshold, and additionally it is also limited to the likelihood of risk, placement, and discipline, but does not include the representation of race within the disability category,

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

citing specifically an overrepresentation. There is also a multi-year flexibility within the reporting of significant disproportionate representation of three consecutive years.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Implications for Legislation

Within the state of Pennsylvania, regarding the calculation of disproportionate representation, as related specifically to the indicators under Section 618d, a Weighted Risk Ratio is used. The LEAs can determine the threshold of these calculations, which is the number that needs to be met to conclude if such disproportionate representation exists. States do not need to report their threshold or methods when determining disproportionate representation. Thus, posing inconsistencies when using a Weighted Risk Ratio and varying thresholds. Within this study, calculations were needed to answer research questions two and three. As previously mentioned throughout this study, RQ2 utilized a Risk Ratio calculation to determine the likelihood of African American students being identified under the disability category of ED. Again, to give the results of that question, African Americans are averaged at about two times more likely to be diagnosed as ED than their White peers, although White demographics showed 4 times more enrollment than African Americans.

To shift gears, the significance of this number can be related back to the thresholds previously discussed. Although the threshold does not need to be disclosed towards the indicators in special education, in relation to the mandatory reporting of significant disproportion, those thresholds are public information via their department of education. In the State of Pennsylvania, the threshold for significant disproportionality for identification is 3, compared to Ohio which is 2.5, Washington which is also 3, and Oregon having a range of 2-2.4 (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2018; PDE, 2018; Washington State Board of Education

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

[SBE], 2018. Therefore, with Pennsylvania having a threshold of 3, significant disproportionality in special education identification may never conclude that this indeed is a problem, disregarding the statistical implications of a lower number. According to the PDE, stakeholder forums were held to gain public feedback regarding the methodology and thresholds. Ultimately, it was up to the stakeholders and additional representatives from the Bureau of Special Education to make the decision. It opens the door to pose questions, such as: who are the stakeholders? and where did the threshold numbers come from?

The PDE has an excel spreadsheet which lists 49 representatives as stakeholders for the state, consisting of but not limited to teachers, IU advisors, union members, administrators, and higher education officials. However, it is unclear of those 49 representatives, who was included in the discussions surrounding the thresholds for determining significant disproportionality in special education. Additionally, the information used to determine the threshold is not made publicly accessible via the PDE website. Again, given the results of this study that not only conclude a heightened risk for African American students in RQ2, but also an overrepresentation based off calculations in RQ3, more transparency by the state in regards this information is needed.

There needs to be more representation regarding stakeholders attending meetings concerning equity and disproportionality. One must look beyond those that are directly connected to the educational system. Including individuals with no personal relationship to education can offer insight to the environmental factors that may need to be taken into consideration when working with diverse groups of children. Community mapping is a way to familiarize oneself with the community make-up of a particular area. Visits to communities in which minority is the majority, could assist in pinpointing community leaders that could hold a

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

spot in the list of stakeholders. This firsthand experience of these community leaders could aid in the insight that is needed as the round table discussions about equity. An additional representation should come from that again, in another field of study, specifically that of health care. As mentioned previously, in other fields of study, particularly within the medical field, the significance of two is deemed a serious level of risk. Offering this level of expertise could assist in more accuracy of threshold determination.

Implications for Intermediate Units (IUs)

The data presented within this study, specifically that related to RQ2, should be eye opening. As previously reported, the risk of identification is valued at a statistical significance of African American students being identified two times that of their White peers, specifically under the disability category of ED. While the aim can be to educate incoming teachers within teacher preparation programs, there is also more that can be done with teachers who are currently in the field. Utilizing the secondary data across the last decade meant that data would be included from the earlier times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the review of literature on the effects of COVID-19, a theme that emerged related to equitable education of all students, regardless of their standing within special education (Nadworny & Kamenetz, 2020). More specific to the effects within special education were that of the ability to complete referrals and evaluations during that time (Reupert et al., 2021). Additionally, the pandemic has increased the already existing achievement gap, and students were reported to have negative post-secondary outcomes (Jameson et al., 2020).

The IUs across the state are required to bridge the gap between the PDE and the school, most commonly through the trainings offered within ACT 48 programming. The Act 48 of 1999 legislation requires public-school teachers within the state of Pennsylvania to undergo trainings

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

referred to as *professional development* (PDE, 2022). Regarding programming related to diverse learners, there were 5 of 79 courses offered within the Allegheny Intermediate Unit alone. There were also no records found regarding the impact on education as related to the pandemic across all IU's. In fact, within all courses, there are more classes offered on how to navigate Microsoft Word and PowerPoint; there is more of an emphasis on basic level computer operating skills than on understanding a half-century long phenomenon within special education. Additionally, special education courses were aimed at providing more detail about disability categories, specifically Autism. There is a disconnect between the gap that IUs are intended to bridge. Currently in educational policy, legislators are looking at special education accessibility and equity in education, thus the courses should reflect training on such.

Implications for Teacher Education

Previous studies relate to the referral process as reviewed in Chapter 2 concluded that inconsistencies with this part of special education are not only noted nationwide, but can also vary at the state level, and even further between districts or between school buildings (Skiba et al, 2006). These inconsistencies and variance with identification, directly relate to the identification of youth in special education, specifically when focusing on indicators of IDEA under Section 618d. At the start of the referral process in special education is Child Find. Child Find can be defined under IDEA, Part B as “identifying, locating, and evaluating children who may be in need of special education services” (USDOE, IDEA Regulations, Part B). With the Equity in IDEA, the reporting of children for disproportion related to identification, placement, and discipline now includes children ages 3-5. Thus, putting early childhood educators at the front of the referral process. Activities that relate to the locating of children can include, but are not limited to, screenings (e.g., hearing and vision), academic assessments, behavioral

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

assessments, observations, as well as parental and/or educator input (PDE, 2018). However, again the tools and measures used, can also vary across the state.

Within this current study, in RQ2, the question posed was directly related to the likelihood that African American students would be identified under the disability category of ED, compared to their White peers. For this question, calculating a risk was used, and directly related to previous studies that also calculated risk of identification (Ahram et al, 2011, Annamma, 2014, Sullivan & Bal, 2013). The results from this current study showed that African American students are two times more likely to be identified for special education services under the category of ED, which is consistent with the findings of the previously mentioned studies. A risk calculation of two (2) is significant, not only in research of this phenomenon of special education, but also within other fields of study as being historically significant. These results can conclude that there is a lack of standards within the referral process as far as who is making the referral and conducting the screening and/or evaluation. As previously mentioned in Chapter 3 as a threat to the study, under reliability; the variability of this referral process can aid in misidentification in special education, and specific to this study, misidentification of students with ED.

Given this information, more needs to be done at the preparation level before a teacher candidate steps into a classroom. The PDE made changes to teacher certification programs in August 2013, which restructured the numerical breakdown of teacher certificates. The switch was made from Elementary Education encompassing grades K-6, instead offering a smaller breakdown with Early Childhood PK-4. A glance at several Pennsylvania university program requirements within Early Childhood, students are required to take at the most, three courses related to special education, which include an overview of disabilities and offering instructional

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

strategies. With any teacher having the accessibility to make a referral for special education, there should be course work to cover the special education process. Although this process is in dire need of a makeover, so to speak, teacher candidates who will go straight from college to a classroom will need better accessibility to special education resources.

Limitations

There are two overarching limitations within this study. One of the primary limitations would be that of the secondary data that were used within the study. With secondary data, one must consider the relevancy and the accuracy regarding the way the data set being used. The relevancy of the data did not pose a limitation since the data are already utilized to determine different factors in special education (e.g., suspension rates, least restrictive environment). This study is also using the data to determine similar factors, specifically that of disproportionality and risk. However, the second risk of using secondary data, that of accuracy, is what became a limitation in this study. The data is provided from school districts across the state of Pennsylvania, as previously mentioned, to abide by IDEA Section 618, which is commonly referred to as the child count. Child count can be simply explained as the number of enrolled students within a district that have a disability and receive services under their IEP (PDE, 2021). The data are dependent on special education enrollment data that are received by December 1, of the previously obtained year. Data are expected to be reported accurately, however, one must account for human error. Additionally, there may be documentation that happens outside of the December 1st deadline, which again would not be utilized in the existing data set. Related to this study, accuracy of the data may hinder results whereas some students may not be represented or accounted for.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

An additional limitation to this study is through the combination of the district-level data to obtain state-level data. While the data that was used and analyzed showed disproportionate representation of African American students within the disability category of ED across the state of Pennsylvania, this representation may not be occurring within specific districts.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on special education data within the state of Pennsylvania to determine if disproportionate representation exists across the state. The reasoning to show a statewide occurrence is to paint a picture that even after decades worth of research, that there continues to be a trend in special education of significant disproportionality. The recommendations are related to that within policy and within practice.

The first recommendation would be to take the data analysis a step further by breaking down the results by district, considering demographics of the different areas that may or may not show disproportionate representation. Once data are obtained by demographic information related to the community that the district resides in, more information could then be collected as related to the staff, for example the race of the teaching staff and experience of staff, specific to those who are directly related to the referral process. Previous studies have concluded that there is an additional problem within the referral process, aiding to disproportionality, yet no solution to that problem has been explored (Harry & Klinger, 2014). One the main areas of focus when reviewing literature related to that of the referral process, stemmed around the topic of being an incompatible student, or having differences that vary from the norm. One study reflected on the notion that teachers were referring students for services simply due to having behaviors that were no compatible with their way of teaching (Linton, 2015). Most teachers fall into two categories of gender and race. In turn, there are White female teachers making the referral for black male

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

students, specifically regarding ED. By examining the referral process, teachers can start to put in check their own bias. Understanding that students who are from diverse backgrounds may react differently in certain situations, due to other environmental factors. One area to assist in navigating the referral process is in providing teachers with best practices, through the teaching of cultural responsiveness (Ford, 2012). Teaching staff should acknowledge the differences of each child, aim to build meaningful relationships, and to create a classroom community (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). In the study by Ahram et al (2010), results concluded that teachers have limited resources, misconceptions of diverse students, and use cultural deficits against diverse learners. In addition, it was reported that new teachers who are coming into programs are inexperienced when it comes to diverse learners, resulting in higher referrals due to the lack of knowledge (Losen et al, 2014). More state level trainings, specific to the state of Pennsylvania in regard to Act 48 continuing education, should be aimed at providing teachers with more accessibility to these resources.

A secondary recommendation for future research would be to review the disability category of ED and the specific criteria that are used when diagnosing students. Throughout the review of literature, ED is a diverse disability category that encompasses so much more than a frequency of challenging behaviors (e.g., conduct disorder). An example is within the IDEA definition of ED, where a child can have anxiety disorder and falls into this disability category. However, the severity and frequency must be able to reflect that there is an impact on academic achievement. One can argue that conduct disorder would be more outwardly observed, compared to someone with anxiety, which can almost appear invisible. Due to the subjectiveness of this disability category, there is room for an individual to offer their own personal reflection of a student, rather than one based on facts and evidence. This area of research could help with taking

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

away the ability of an individual to refer based on their own predisposition, but rather due to a student meeting a specific criterion for referral.

Lastly, a recommendation regarding the standard that the state uses to determine if disproportion representation exists, should be further explored. Much like the disability category of ED having a varying level of interpretation, so does the calculation when determining if disproportion exists. The study could examine the breakdown per state with more transparency by 1) making their method of how they calculate the indicators involving disproportionality public and 2) thresholds that are also specified at the federal level, not left up to the state. The results that show a varying degree of measure, could in turn lead to a change in guidelines in how states are required to report special education data. In addition, significant disproportionality is yet to be defined in IDEA, further clarification on this within publication could further enhance the reporting measures.

Summary

This study examined disproportionality within special education, specifically African American students being diagnosed with ED. Although similar studies have been completed regarding this phenomenon, adding Pennsylvania to the list of states to show overrepresentation, is an important contribution towards research and assisting in finding answers as to why this continues to be the trend. Additionally, the global pandemic of COVID-19 opened the eyes into the education system, specifically that in the United States, showing the lack of resources and inconsistencies in providing equitable education for all students, specifically those in special education. While not the ideal way to bring insight into more effective practices, perhaps that was a way to open more communication surrounding policy and to elicit change. With this study utilizing data both pre-pandemic and during pandemic, with results not varying, disproportionate

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

representation will continue to be the norm. This study provided strong evidence that shows disproportionate representation in special education across the state of Pennsylvania in the past ten years/decade, which continues to bring awareness to the country wide problem.

References

- Aaroe, L., & Nelson, J. R. (2000). A comparative analysis of teachers', Caucasian parents', and Hispanic parents' views of problematic school survival behaviors. *Education and Treatment of Children, 23*(3), 314–324.
- Ahram, R., Fergus, E., & Noguera, P. (2011). Addressing racial/ethnic disproportionality in special education: Case studies of suburban school districts. *Teachers College Record, 113*(10), 2233–2266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0161468111111301004>
- Albrecht, S. F., Skiba, R. J., Losen, D. J., Chung, C., & Middleberg, L. (2012). Federal policy on disproportionality in special education: Is it moving us forward? *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 23*, 14–25. doi:10.1177/1044207311407917
- Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press. NY: New York
- Alter, P., Walker, J., & Landers, E. (2013). Teachers' perceptions of students' challenging behavior and the impact of teacher demographics. *Education and Treatment of Children 36*(4), 51–69. <https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2013.0040>
- American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist, 63*(9), 852–862.
- Annamma, S., Morrison, D. & Jackson, D. (2014). Disproportionality fills in the gaps: Connections between achievement, discipline, and special education in the school-to-prison pipeline. *Berkeley Review of Education, 5*(1), 53–87. Doi: 10.5070/B85110003

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Armour, J., & Hammond, S. (2009). Minority youth in juvenile justice system: Disproportionate minority contact. Washington, DC: National Conference of State Legislatures.
- Arnold, M., & Lessmann, M. E. (2003). Overrepresentation of minority students in special education. *Education, 124*(2), 230–236.
- Artiles, A. J., Trent, S. C., & Palmer, J. (2004). Culturally diverse students in special education: Legacies and prospects. *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education, 2*, 716–735.
- Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E. B., Trent, S. C., Osher, D., & Ortiz, A. (2010). Justifying and explaining disproportionality, 1968–2008: A critique of underlying views of culture. *Exceptional Children, 76*(3), 279–299. doi:10.1177/001440291007600303
- Aud, S., Hussar, W, Kena, C, Bianco, K., Fröhlich, L., Kemp, Hannes, C. (2011). The condition of education 2011 (NCES 2011–033). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Bal, A., Kozleski, E. B., Schrader, E. M., Rodriguez, E. M., & Pelton, S. (2014). Systemic transformation from the ground–up using learning lab to design culturally responsive schoolwide positive behavioral supports. *Remedial and Special Education, 35*, 327–339. doi:10.1177/074193251453699
- Basch C. (2011). Healthier students are better learners: A missing link in school reforms to close the achievement gap. *Journal of School Health, 81*(10), 593–598. doi: 10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00632.x.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Bates, A., & Pardo, L. S. (2010). Action research: Can it be a means for helping teacher candidates learn about student diversity? *Inquiry in Education, 1*(2), 1–14.
- Bays, D., & Crockett, J. (2007). Investigating instructional leadership for special education. *Exceptionality, 15*, 143–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09362830701503495>
- Becker, S. P., Paternite, C. E., Evans, S. W., Andrews, C., Christensen, O. A., Kraan, E. M., & Weist, M. D. (2011). Eligibility, assessment, and educational placement issues for students classified with emotional disturbance: Federal and state-level analyses. *School Mental Health, 3*(1), 24–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-010-9045-2>
- Bell, D. (1991). Racism is here to stay: Now what? *Howard Law Journal, 35*, 79–93.
- Bickel, R. D. (1998). A brief history of the commitment to inclusion as a facet of equal educational opportunity. *New Directions for Student Services, 83*, 3–13.
- Black, R., & Leake D. (2011). Teachers' views of self-determination for students with emotional/behavioral disorders: The limitations of an individualistic perspective. *International Journal of Special Education, 26*(1), 147–161.
- Blackwell, W. H., & Rossetti, Z. S. (2014). The development of individualized education programs: Where have we been and where should we go now? *Sage Open, 4*(2), 215824401453041. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014530411>
- Bleak, K., Hogue, L., Abernathy, T. & Oikonomidoy, E. (2019). Overcoming disproportionality, one teacher at a time. *Educational Research: Theory and Practice, 30*(1), 34–37.
- Blustein, D. L., & Guarino, P. A. (2020). Work and unemployment in the time of COVID-19: The existential experience of loss and fear. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 60*(5), 702–709. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167820934229>

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Bollmer, J., Bethel, J., Garrison-Mogren, R., & Brauen, M. (2007). Using the risk ratio to assess racial/ethnic disproportionality in special education at the school-district level. *The Journal of Special Education, 41*(3), 186–198.
doi: 10.1177/00224669070410030401
- Boykin, A. W. (1994). Afrocultural expression and its implications for schooling. In E. R. Hollins, J. E. King, & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching Diverse Populations: Formulating a Knowledge Base* (pp. 243-256). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Bradley-Adkison, C., Johnson P., Rawls G., & Plunkett, D. (2006). Overrepresentation of African American males in special education programs: Implications and advocacy strategies for school counselors. *Journal of School Counseling, 4*(1)16.
Retrieved from <http://www.jsc.montana.edu/articles/v4n16.pdf>
- Bradley R., Doolittle J., & Bartolotta R. (2008). Building on the data and adding to the discussion: the experiences and outcomes of students with emotional disturbance. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 17*(1), 4–23. doi:10.1007/s10864-007-9058-6
- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
- Brown, K. D., & Brown, A. L. (2011). Teaching K-8 students about race: African Americans, racism, and the struggle for social justice in the US. *Multicultural Education, 19*(1), 9–13.
- Brown-Jeffy, S. & Cooper, J. (2011). Toward a conceptual framework of culturally relevant pedagogy: An overview of the conceptual and theoretical literature. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 38*(1), 65–84.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Campbell-Whatley, G. D., & Comer, J. (2000). Self-concept and African American student achievement: Related issues of ethics, power and privilege. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 23(1), 19–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088840640002300105>
- Cancio, E., Albrecht, S., & Johns, B. (2013). Defining administrative support and its relationship to the attrition of teachers and students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Education of Exceptional Children*, 36(4), 71–94.
doi:10.1353/etc.2013.0035
- Cartledge, G., Gardner, R., & Ford, D. (2009). *Diverse Learners with Exceptionalities: Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). *Mental health treatment among children aged 5-17 years*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db381.htm>
- Children’s Defense Fund. (2009). *Cradle to prison pipeline®: Juvenile justice factsheet*.
<https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/cradle-to-prison-pipeline-juvenile-justice-fact-sheet-2009.pdf>
- Christakis, D. A., Van Cleve, W., & Zimmerman, F. J. (2020). Estimation of US children’s educational attainment and years of life lost associated with primary school closures during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. *JAMA network open*, 3(11), e2028786-e2028786. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.28786>
- Coutinho, M. (1986). Reading achievement of students identified as behaviorally disordered at the secondary level. *Behavioral Disorders*, 11(3), 200–207.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Coutinho, M., Oswald, D., Best, A., & Forness, S. (2002). Gender and sociodemographic factors and the disproportionate identification of culturally and linguistically diverse students with emotional disturbance. *Behavioral Disorders, 27*, 109–125. doi:10.1177/019874290202700202
- Coker, D. (2021). Risk ratios and special education: The cure is worse than the disability. *World Journal of Education, 10*(4), 1–14. doi:10.5430/wje.v10n4p1.
- Concepts, L., 2015. The Glossary of Education Reform. [online] Retrieved from <https://www.edglossary.org/aggregate-data/>
- Cummins, J. (1986). Psychological assessment of minority students: Out of context, out of focus, out of control. *Journal of Reading, Writing, and Learning Disabilities International, 2*(1), 9–18. doi:10.1080/0748763860020103
- Delgado, R. (Ed.). (1995). *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Delgado, D., & Stefancic, J. (2001) *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: NYU Press.
- Donovan, M., & Cross, C. (Eds.). (2002). *Minority Students in Special and Gifted Education*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2020). COVID-19 and learning loss disparities grow and students need help. *McKinsey and Company, December, 8*, 6–7.
- Dunn, L. M. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded is much of it justifiable? *Exceptional Children, 23*, 5–21.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Ervin-Robinson, P., Cartledge, G., Ruo-Musti, S., Gibson, L., & Keyes, S. (2016). Social skills instruction for urban learners with emotional and behavioral disorders: A culturally responsive and computer-based intervention. *Behavioral Disorders, 41*(4), 209–225.
<https://doi.org/10.17988/bedi-41-04-209-225.1>
- Farmer, R. L., McGill, R. J., Dombrowski, S. C., McClain, M. B., Harris, B., Lockwood, A. B., ... & Stinnett, T. A. (2020). Teleassessment with children and adolescents during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and beyond: Practice and policy implications. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 51*(5), 477.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000349>
- Ferri, B. A. & Connor, D. J. (2005). In the shadow of Brown: Special education and overrepresentation of students of color. *Remedial and Special Education, 26*(2), 93–100.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325050260020401>
- Finn, J. D. (1982). Patterns in special education placement as revealed by the OCR survey. In K. A. Heller, W. Holtzman, & S. Messick (Ed.), *Placing Children in Special Education: A strategy for equity* (pp. 322–381). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Foner, E. (1999). The strange career of the reconstruction amendments. *Yale Law Journal 108*(8), 2003–2009.
- Ford, D. Y. (2011). *Multicultural Gifted Education: Rationale, Models, Strategies, and Resources (2nd ed.)*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Ford, D., (2012). Culturally different students in special education: Looking backward to move forward. *Council for Exceptional Children, 78*(4), 391–405.
doi:10.1177/001440291207800401

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Ford D., & Kea, C. (2009). Creating culturally responsive instruction: For students' and teachers' sakes. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 41*(9), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.17161/foec.v41i9.6841>
- Forness, S. R., Freeman, S. F., Paparella, T., Kauffman, J. M., & Walker, H. M. (2011). Special Education implications of point and cumulative prevalence for children with emotional or behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 19*(3), 4–18.
doi:10.1177/1063426611401624
- Foster, S. L., Bell-Dolan, D. J., & Burge, D. A. (1988). *Behavioral observation*. In A. S. Bellack & M. Hersen (Eds.), *Behavioral Assessment: A Practical Handbook* (3rd Edition). NY: Pergamon
- Garcia, E. (2015). Lorenzo P. v. Riles? Should the "Larry P." prohibitions be extended to English language learners?: Considering public policy & IQ testing in schools. *Multicultural Education, 22*(2), 2–7.
- Garda Jr, R. A. (2004). Untangling eligibility requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. *Missouri Law Review, 69*, 441.
- Gardner, S. K., Jansujwicz, J. S., Hutchins, K., Cline, B., & Levesque, V. (2014). Socialization to interdisciplinarity: Faculty and student perspectives. *Higher Education, 67*(3), 255–271. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9648-2>
- Gay, L.R., Mills, G.E., & Airasian, P. (2009). *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications*. Pearson Education. Upper Saddle River: NJ.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Gibb, A. C., Skiba, R., & Indiana Univ., B. I. C. for E. (2008). Using Data to Address Equity

Issues in Special Education. Education Policy Brief. Volume 6, Number 3, Winter 2008.

In *Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University*. Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University.

Girvan, E. J., Gion, C., McIntosh, K., & Smolkowski, K. (2017). The relative

contribution of subjective office referrals to racial disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 32(3), 392–404.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000178>

Goyat, R., Vyas, A., & Sambamoorthi, U. (2016). Racial/ethnic disparities in disability

prevalence. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 3(4), 635–645.

doi:10.1007/s40615-015-0182-z

Green, E. (2010, March 7). Can good teaching be learned? *New York Times Magazine*, 30–46.

Grob, A., Krings, F., & Bangerter, A. (2001). Life markers in biographical narratives of people

from three cohorts: A life span perspective in historical context. *Human Development*, 44, 171–190. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000057057>

Guerrero, A.D., Rodriguez, M.A., & Flores, G. (2011). Disparities in provider elicitation of parents' developmental concerns for US children. *Pediatrics*, 128, 901–909.

doi: 10.1542/peds.2011-0030

Guinier, L. (1991). No two seats: The elusive quest for political equality. *Virginia Law*

Review, 77(8), 1413–1514. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1073331>

Hanchon, T. A., & Allen, R. A. (2013). Identifying students with emotional disturbance: School

psychologists' practices and perceptions. *Psychology in the Schools*, 50(2), 193–208.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21668>

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Hanchon, T., & Allen, R. (2017). The identification of students with emotional disturbance: Moving the field towards responsible assessment practices. *Psychology in the Schools*, 55(2), 176–189. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22099>
- Handwerk, M. L., & Marshall, R. M. (1998). Behavioral and emotional problems of students with learning disabilities, serious emotional disturbance, or both conditions. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 31(4), 327–338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002221949803100402>
- Harry, B., & Anderson, M. G. (1994). The disproportionate placement of African American males in special education programs: A critique of the process. *Journal of Negro Education*, 63(4), 602–620. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2967298>
- Harry, B., & Klinger, J. (2006). *Why are So Many Minority Students in Special Education? Understanding Race and Disability in Schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Harry, B., & Klingner, J. (2014). *Why are So Many Minority Students in Special Education? Understanding Race and Disability in Schools*. (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Hart, J. E., Cramer, E. D., Harry, B., Klingner, J. K., & Sturges, K. M. (2010). The continuum of “troubling” to “troubled” behavior: Exploratory case studies of African American students in programs for emotional disturbance. *Remedial and Special Education*, 31(3), 148–162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932508327468>
- Hartlep, N. D. (2009). Critical Race Theory An Examination of its Past, Present, and Future Implications. In *Online Submission*. Online Submission.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Henderson, K., Klein, S., Gonzalez, P., & Bradley, R. (2005). Teachers of children with emotional disturbance: A national look at preparation, teaching conditions, and practices. *Behavioral Disorders, 31*(1), 6–17.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/019874290503100101>
- Hoffman, J. A., & Miller, E. A. (2020). Addressing the consequences of school closure due to COVID-19 on children's physical and mental well-being. *World Medical and Health Policy, 12*(3), 300–310. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wmh3.365>
- Hosp, J. L., & Reschly, D. J. (2003). Referral rates for intervention and assessment: A meta-analysis of tactical differences. *Journal of Special Education, 37*, 67–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669030370020201>
- House, J. (1981). *Work Stress and Social Support*. Reading, MA: Addison- Wesley.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004).
- IDEA Data Center (May, 2014). *Methods for Assessing Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education: A Technical Assistance Guide* (Revised). Retrieved from https://ideadata.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2017-09/idc_ta_guide_for_508-010716.pdf
- Jameson, J.M., Stegenga, S.M., Ryan, J., & Green, A. (2020). Free appropriate public education in the time of COVID-19. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 39*(4), 181–192.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/8756870520959659>
- Kindig, J. (2007, December 06). *March on Washington movement (1941-1947)*. BlackPast.org.
<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/march-washington-movement-1941-1947>

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Klingner, J. K., Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E., Harry, B., Zion, S., Tate, W., Durán, G. Z., & Riley, D.

(2005). Addressing the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education through culturally responsive educational systems.

Education Policy Analysis Archives, 13(38). doi:10.14507/epaa.v13n38.2005

Ladner, M. (2004). Race to the bottom: Minority children and special education in Arizona

public schools. *Policy Report*, 193. Retrieved from

www.goldwaterinstitute.org/article.php/442.html.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). Who will teach our children: Preparing teachers to

successfully teach African American students. In Hollins, E. R., King, J. E., Hayman, W.

C. (Eds.), *Teaching Diverse Populations: Formulating a Knowledge Base* (pp. 129–

142). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education.

Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education, 97(1), 47–68.

doi:10.1177/016146819509700104

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field

like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7–24.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003005995-2>

Ladson-Billings, G. (1997). Crafting a culturally relevant social studies approach. In E. W. Ross

(Ed.), *The social studies curriculum* (pp. 121-136). Albany, NY: State University of New

York Press.

Lambert, M. C., Epstein, M., Ingram, S., Simpson, A., & Bernstein, S. (2014). Psychometrics

and measurement invariance of the Emotional and Behavioral Screener. *Behavioral*

Disorders, 39(2), 89–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019874291303900205>

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Landrum, T. J., Tankersley, M., & Kauffman, J. M. (2003). What is special about special education for students with emotional or behavioral disorders? *The Journal of Special Education, 37*, 148–156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669030370030401>
- Larsen, E.(n.d.). A history of slavery in the United States. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/interactive/slavery-united-states/>
- Ledesma, M.C., Calderón D. (2015). Critical race theory in education: A review of past literature and a look to the future. *Qualitative Inquiry, 21*(3), 206–222. doi:[10.1177/1077800414557825](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557825)
- Lewis, T. (2016). Does the field of ED need a distinct set of “intensive” interventions or more systemic intensity within a continuum of social/emotional supports? *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 24*(3), 187–190. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426616652866>
- Lewis, C. W., James, M., Hancock, S., & Hill-Jackson, V. (2008). Framing African American students' success and failure in urban settings: A typology for change. *Urban Education, 43*(2), 127–153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085907312315>
- Linton, K. F. (2015). Differential ratings of specific behaviors of African Americans children in special education. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 32*(3), 229–235. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-014-0363-3>
- Losen D. & Welner K. (2001). Disabling discrimination in our public schools: Comprehensive legal challenges to inappropriate and inadequate special education services for minority children. *Harvard Civil Rights Civil Liberties Law Review, 36*(2), 407–460.
- Losen, D. J. & Orfield, G. (Eds.). (2002). *Racial Inequality in Special Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Losen, D.J. (2011). *Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from

<http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/discipline-policies>.

Losen, D.J., (Ed.) (2015). *Closing the School Discipline Gap: Equitable Remedies for Excessive Exclusion*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press

Losen, D, Hodson, C., Ee, J., & Martinez, T. (2014). Disturbing inequities: Exploring the relationship between racial disparities in special education identification and discipline. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*. 5(2). Retrieved from

<https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol5/iss2/15>

Lynn, M., & Parker, L. (2006). Critical race studies in education: Examining a decade of research on US schools. *The Urban Review*, 38(4), 257–290.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-006-0035-5>

Mallet, C.A., Stoddard-Dare, P., & Workman-Crewnshaw, L. (2011). Special education disabilities and juvenile delinquency: A unique challenge for school social work. *School Social Work Journal*, 36(1), 26–40.

Marder, C. (1992). Education after secondary school. In M. Wagner, R. D'Amico, C.

Marder, Newman, & J. Blackorby (Eds.), *What Happens Next? Trends in Postschool Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities. The Second Comprehensive Report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students* (pp. 31–39).

Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Martin, E., Martin, R., & Terman, D. (1996). The legislative and litigation history of special education. *The Future of Children*, 6, 25–39.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Mason-Williams L, Bettini E, Gagnon JC. (2017). Access to qualified special educators across elementary neighborhood and exclusionary schools. *Remedial and Special Education, 38*(5), 297–307. doi:10.1177/0741932517713311
- Massey, P. A., & Rosenbaum, S. A. (2005). Disability matters: Toward a law school clinical model for serving youth with special education needs, *Clinical Law Review, 11*, 271–334.
- McEvoy, A., & Welker, R. (2000). Antisocial behavior, academic failure, and school climate. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 8*(3), 130–140.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/106342660000800301>
- McKenna J. (2013). The disproportionate representation of African Americans in programs for students with emotional and behavioral disorders, *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 57*(4), 206–211, doi: [10.1080/1045988X.2012.687792](https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2012.687792)
- Meiners E.R. (2007). *Right to Be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies*. Routledge.
- Mercer, J. R. (1973). *Labeling the Mentally Retarded*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Merrell, K., & Walker, H. (2004). Deconstructing a definition: Social maladjustment versus emotional disturbance and moving the ED field forward. *Psychology in the Schools, 41*(8), 899–910. doi:10.1002/pits.20046
- Mills, G. E., & Gay, L. R. (2019). *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications*. NY, NY: Pearson.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Moll, K., Kunze, S., Neuhoff, N., Bruder, J., & Schulte-Korne, G. (2014). Specific learning disorder: Prevalence and gender differences. *Public Library of Science One*, 9(7), 1-8.
doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0103537
- Nadworny, E., & Kamenetz, A. (2020, March 23). Education Department Says Disability Laws Shouldn't Get in the Way of Online Learning [National Public Radio].
<https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/03/23/820138079/education-dept-says-disability-laws-shouldnt-get-in-the-wayof-online-learning>
- National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2003). *Subgroup results for the nation and states*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2003/2005453_3.pdf.
- National Center for Learning Disabilities, U.S. National Center for Learning Disabilities NCLD. United States, 2020. Web Archive. https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-NCLD-Disproportionality_Trends-and-Actions-for-Impact_FINAL-1.pdf
- National Juvenile Justice Network. (2009). *National Juvenile Justice Network policy platform: Conditions of confinement*. Retrieved from <http://www.njjn.org>.
- Newman, L., Wagner, M., Knokey, A., Marder, C., Nagle, K., Shaver, D., & Wei, X. (2011). *The post-high school outcomes of young adults with disabilities up to 8 years after high school: A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.
- Osher, D., Bear, G.G., Sprague, J.R., & Doyle, D., (2010). How can we improve school discipline? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 48–58.
doi:10.3102/0013189x09357618

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Osher, D., & Hanley, T. V. (2001). Implementing the SED national agenda: Promising programs and policies for children and youth with emotional and behavioral problems. *Education and Treatment of Children, 24*, 374–403.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315792989-3>
- Osher, D., Woodruff, D., & Sims, A. (2000). *Exploring relationships between inappropriate and ineffective special education services for African American and youth and their overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system*. Paper presented at The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
- Parker, L., & Lynn, M. (2002). What's race got to do with it? Critical race theory's conflicts with and connections to qualitative research methodology and epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 7–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800102>
- Parker, L., & Stovall, D. O. (2004). Actions following words: Critical race theory connects to critical pedagogy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 36*(2), 167–182.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2004.00059.x>
- Patton, J. M. (1998). The disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education: Looking behind the curtain for understanding and solutions. *Journal of Special Education, 32*, 25–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002246699803200104>
- Pennsylvania Department of Education (2011-2021). *Special education data reporting*.
<https://penndata.hbg.psu.edu/Public-Reporting>
- PEW Center on the States. (2008). *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*. Washington DC.
- Pfrommer, J.L. (2020, November 16). *Predetermination in a nutshell and how to avoid it*. District Administration. <https://districtadministration.com/predetermination-in-a-nutshell-and-how-to-avoid-it/>

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/163/537/>

Posny, A. (2007). Disproportionality of racial and ethnic groups in special education. Retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/osep-memo-07-09-disproportionality-of-racial-and-ethnic-groups-in-special-education/>.

Quinn, M. M., Rutherford, R. B., Leone, P. E., Osher, D. M., & Poirier, J. M. (2005). Youth with disabilities in juvenile corrections: A national survey. *Exceptional Children*, 71(3), 339–345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290507100308>

Reddy, L. A., De Thomas, C. A., Newman, E., & Chun, V. (2009). School-based prevention and intervention programs for children with emotional disturbance: A review of treatment components and methodology. *Psychology in the Schools*, 46(2), 132–153. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20359>

Research in Action Philadelphia. (2018). *Supporting early readers: A scan of K-3 literacy practices in Philadelphia charter schools*. <https://www.researchforaction.org/research-resources/k-12/supporting-early-readers-a-scan-of-k-3-literacy-practices-in-philadelphia-charter-schools/>

Reupert, A., Schaffer, G. E., Von Hagen, A., Allen, K.-A., Berger, E., Büttner, G., Power, E. M., Morris, Z., Paradis, P., Fisk, A. K., Summers, D., Wurf, G., & May, F. (2022). The practices of psychologists working in schools during COVID-19: A multi-country investigation. *School Psychology*, 37(2), 190–201. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000450>

Sawyer, W. (2019) *Youth Confinement: The Whole Pie*. Prison Policy Initiative, Northampton. Retrieved from <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/youth2019.htm>

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Shippen M., Curtis R., & Miller A. (2009). A qualitative analysis of teachers' and counselors' perceptions of the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 32*(3), 226–238.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406409340009>
- Simmons-Reed, E. A., & Cartledge, G. (2014). School discipline disproportionality: Culturally competent interventions for African American males. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning, 4*(2), 95–109.
- Skiba, R.J., Michael, R.S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *Urban Review, 34*, 317–342. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021320817372>
- Skiba, R. J., & Rausch, M. K. (2006). Zero tolerance, suspension, and expulsion: Questions of equity and effectiveness. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Classroom Management: Research, Practice, and Contemporary Issues* (pp. 1063–1089). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Skiba, R. J., Poloni-Staudinger, L., Gallini, S., Simmons, A. B., & Feggins-Azziz, R. (2006). Disparate access: The disproportionality of African American students with disabilities across educational environments. *Exceptional Children, 72*(4), 411–424.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290607200402>
- Skiba, R., Simmons, A., Ritter, S., Gibb, A, Rausch, M., Cuadrado, J., & Chung, C-G. (2008). Achieving equity in special education: History, status, and current challenges. *Council for Exceptional Children, 74*(3), 264–288. doi:10.1177/001440290807400301

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., & Williams, N. T. (2014). More than a metaphor: The contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 47*(4), 546–564. doi:10.1080/10665684.2014.958965
- Sloboda, B. (2016, September 16). Understanding Secondary Data in Research. Retrieved from <https://research.phoenix.edu/center-global-business-research/blog/understanding-secondary-data-research>.
- Snyder, T. (2002). *Digest of Education Statistics 2001*. Washington, D. C.: National Center on Education Statistics.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001). From racial stereotyping and deficit discourse toward a critical race theory in teacher education. *Multicultural Education, 9*(1), 2.
- Sparks, D. (2004). The looming danger of a two-tiered professional development system. *Phi Delta Kappan, 86*(4), 304–306.
- Sullivan, A.L., & Bal, A. (2013). Disproportionality in special education: Effects of individual and school variables on disability risk. *Council for Exceptional Children, 79*(4), 475–494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291307900406>
- Sullivan, A. L., & Sadeh, S. S. (2014). Differentiating social maladjustment from emotional disturbance: An analysis of case law. *School Psychology Review, 43*(4), 450–471. <https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-13-0038.1>
- Sullivan, A. L., & Sadeh, S. (2016). Does the empirical literature inform prevention of dropout among students with emotional disturbance? A systematic review and call to action. *Exceptionality, 24*(4), 251–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2016.1196440>

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Sutherland, K. S., Lewis-Palmer, T., Stichter, J., & Morgan, P. L. (2008). Examining the influence of teacher behavior and classroom context on the behavioral and academic outcomes for students with emotional or behavioral disorders. *The Journal of Special Education, 41*(4), 223–233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466907310372>
- Talbert- Johnson, C. (2001). The quest for equity: Maintaining African American teachers in special education. *The Journal of Negro Education, 70*, 286–296. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3211281>
- Tefera, A., & Fischman (2020). How and why context matters in the study of racial disproportionality in special education: Toward a critical disability education policy approach. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 53*(4), 434–449. doi: 10.1080/10665684.2020.1791284
- Thompson, V. L. S., Bazile, A., & Akbar, M. (2004). African Americans' perceptions of psychotherapy and psychotherapists. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 35*(1), 19. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.35.1.19>
- Thorius, K. A., & Maxcy, B. D. (2014). Critical practice analysis of special education policy. *Remedial and Special Education, 36*(2), 116–124. doi:10.1177/0741932514550812
- Townsend, B. L. (2000). The disproportionate discipline of African American learners: Reducing school suspensions and expulsions. *Exceptional Children, 66*, 381–391. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290006600308>
- Tyson, K., Darity Jr, W., & Castellino, D. R. (2005). It's not “a black thing”: Understanding the burden of acting white and other dilemmas of high achievement. *American Sociological Review, 70*(4), 582–605. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000403>

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

United States Department of Education. (2000). Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. *22nd annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act*. Washington, DC: Office of Special Education Programs.

United States Department of Education. (2009). Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. *28th annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. U.S. Department of Education. United States Department of

Education. (2017). Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. *39th annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Washington, DC: Office of Special Education Programs.

United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Ensuring equal access to high-quality education*, Washington, D.C., 2011.

Valencia, R. (2010). *Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice*. London, England: Routledge.

Valenzuela, J.S., Copeland, S., Qi Huaqing, C., & Park, M. (2006). Examining educational equity: Revisiting the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. *Council for Exceptional Children*, 72(4), 425–441.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290607200403>

Valle-Riestra, D.M., Shealey, M.W., & Cramer, E.D. (2011). Recruiting and retaining culturally diverse special educators. *The Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 1, 68-87.

Voulgarides, C. K., & Tefera, A. (2017). Reframing the racialization of disabilities in policy. *Theory into Practice* 56(3), 161–168. doi:10.1080/00405841.2017.1336037

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Wagner, M., Marder, C., Levine, P., Cameto, R., Cadwallader, T.W., Blackorby, J., . . .

Newman, L. (2003). *The Individual and Household Characteristics of Youth with Disabilities: A Report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)*.

Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., & Levine, P. (2005). *Changes over Time in the Early Postschool Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities. A Report of Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) and the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Wagner M., Wei X., Thorton P., & Valdes, K. (2016). Accessing services for youth with emotional disturbances in and after high school. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 39(3), 164–174.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143414565837>

Wagner, M. M., Newman, L. A., & Javitz, H. S. (2017). Vocational education course taking and post-high school employment of youth with Emotional Disturbances. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 40(3), 132–143.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143415626399>

Wakelin, M. (2008). Challenging disparities in special education: Moving parents from disempowered team members to ardent advocates. *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy*, 3(2), 263–288.

Walcott, C. M., Hyson, D., McNamara, K., & Charvat, J. L. (2018). Results from the NASP 2015 membership survey, part one: Demographics and employment conditions. *NASP Research Reports*, 3(1), 1–17.

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Watkins, A. M., & Kurtz, P. D. (2001). Using solution-focused intervention to address African American male overrepresentation in special education: A case study. *Children and Schools, 23*(4), 223–234. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/23.4.223>
- Watkins, M. W., & Pacheco, M. (2000). Interobserver agreement in behavioral research: Importance and calculation. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 10*(4), 205-212.
- Wehby, J. H., Lane, K. L., & Falk, K. B. (2003). Academic instruction for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 11* (4), 194–197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10634266030110040101>
- Weinstein, C. S., Tomlinson-Clarke, S., & Curran, M. (2004). Toward a conception of culturally responsive classroom management. *Journal of Teacher Education, 55*(1), 25–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487103259812>
- Witt, Howard. (2007). School discipline tougher on African Americans. *Chicago Tribune*. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/chi-070924discipline-story.html>
- Woodson, L., & Harris, S. (n.d.). Teacher and student demographic variables which predict teacher referrals of males for special education evaluation. *The Journal of At-Risk Issues, (21)*1, 32–43.
- Zhang, D., & Katsiyannis, A. (2002). Minority representation in special education: A persistent challenge. *Remedial and Special Education, 23*(3), 180-187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10634266020230030601>
- Zhang, D., Katsiyannis, A., & Herbst, M. (2004). Disciplinary exclusions in special education: A 4-year analysis. *Behavioral Disorders, 29*(4), 337–347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019874290402900402>

EXAMINING OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Zuberi, T., & Pennsylvania Univ., National Center on Fathers and Families (1998). *African American Men, Inequality and Family Structure: A Research Note*.

Zuberi, T. (2001). *Thicker than Blood: How Racial Statistics Lie* (NED-New edition).

University of Minnesota Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttenc>