

Public Abstract

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Title:An Examination of Practices for Reducing the Overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability Eligibility Category

The purpose of the study was to describe school district practices that reduced the overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriately identifying Black students in this category. One suburban school district no longer identified as being significantly racially disproportionate was studied.

The researcher conducted two focus groups and three interviews. The two focus groups consisted of a total of ten K-12 special education process coordinators divided into two groups. Special education process coordinators are school staff members primarily responsible for conducting evaluations of students to determine if they have disabilities. From the two special education process coordinator focus groups, two special education process coordinators were chosen based upon their knowledge for individual interviews to gather further information. A third individual interview consisted of an elementary special education teacher. Data were collected using audio-recorded focus groups and interviews and a review of school district documents.

Three themes emerged from the data: 1) the impact of dialogue among school staff members in creating greater staff knowledge, 2) the impact of school staff dialogue in determining what a district needs to change, and 3) the implementation of school district initiatives in order to make a change. Implications of the study could assist other school districts who have been identified as significantly racially disproportionate reduce overrepresentation of Black students in special education.