## Reducing Disproportionate Representation in Special Education

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#### References:

- \* Artiles, A. J. & Ortiz, A. A. (2002). English Language Learners with Special Education Needs. McHenry, Illinois: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems Co.
- \*\* Burnette, Jane. (1998). Reducing the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. Available online at <a href="http://ericec.org/digests/e566.html">http://ericec.org/digests/e566.html</a>
- \* Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., & Short, D. (2004). Making Content Comprehensible for English Language Learners. Boston: Pearson.
- \* Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA 2004)
- \* WestED. (2005). Addressing the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. Available online at

http://www.wested.org/cs/we/view/feat/59

Changing & Improving... Consider

"We all want to improve, we just don't want to change."

Dr. Randy Merrill, Superintendent August 2005 Special Programs Opening Institute in Provo City School District

#### IDEIA 2004 emphasizes:

\*States proactively approach reducing disproportionate representation of students of racial or ethnic minorities in special education through Early Intervening Services.

#### Early Intervening Services

- \* LEAs may choose to spend up to 15% of federal funds to develop and implement coordinated early intervening services for any student in need of academic and behavior support for classroom success in an effort to prevent the need for special education services.
- \* LEA procedures for addressing disproportionate representation of students of racial and ethnic minorities in Special Education include mandatory early intervening services.

#### Questions that will be addressed:

- \* What is Meant by Disproportionate Representation of Minorities in Special Education?
- \* Why Minority Students May Be
  Disproportionately Represented in Special
  Education?
- \* What Can Be Done to Reduce Disproportionate Representation?

# What is Meant by Disproportionate Representation of Minorities in Special Education?



#### Disproportionate Representation

\*Under or over representation of minority students in special education mild/moderate disability categories, such as specific learning disabled, emotional disturbed, and speech and language disorders.

### Examples of Disproportionality (Burnette, 1998):

- \*In 1992, although African-American students accounted for 16 percent of the total U.S. student population, they represented:
  - 32% of students in programs for intellectual disabilities (ID),
  - ▶ 29% in programs for specific learning disabilities (SLD), and
  - ▶ 24% in programs for emotional disturbance (ED).

## Three Concerns About Disproportionality (OSEP & OCR):

- 1. Students may be unserved, underrepresented, or receive services that they do not need.
- 2. Students may be **misclassified** or inappropriately labeled
- 3. Placement in special education classes may be a form of **discrimination**.

## Why Minority Students May Be Disproportionately Represented in Special Education?



#### Consider...

- \* 2 most common reasons for referral to special education are (WestEd, 2005):
  - Behavior
  - Poor performance in basic reading skills

- \* 3 factors that highly impact referral rate (Artilles & Ortiz, 2002):
  - Teacher tolerance
  - Alignment of student's ability with the teacher's perceived notions about the student's ability or behavior
  - Teacher's approach to instruction and classroom management

Teachers may be mistaking minority students' limits in articulating their thinking due to lack of English acquisition or lack of preparation outside school for limits in their ability to think.



#### Other Possible Reasons (Artilles & Ortiz, 2002)

- \*\* Behaviors associated with the normal second language acquisition process may be confused with language and/or learning disabilities.
- \* Biases in the evaluation process due to: 1) students not being familiar with standard test-taking practices, 2) students not being assessed in their native language and/or 3) evaluation results may be reflecting cultural differences instead of disability.

#### Other Possible Reasons (Artilles & Ortiz, 2002)

- \* Size of English language learner population in a school or district.
- \* Availability of professional development in teaching students with language differences and/or language-based disabilities.

Table 1: Causes of Confusion in Assessing Students with Language Differences and/or language Learning Disabilities (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004, p. 171)

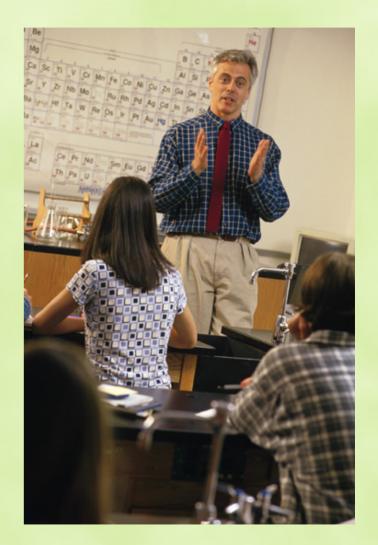
Language Differences		Language Learning Disabilities
Language performance is similar to other students who have had comparable cultural and linguistic experiences.		Language patterns are unique to the student and unlike others in the student's cultural community.
Limited vocabulary in the native language is due to lack of opportunity to use and hear the native language.	-	Student demonstrates <b>limited vocabulary</b> even when there are rich language opportunities in the native language.
Student shifts from one language to another within an utterance.		Word finding problems are evident and student substitutes with another language.
Communication may be impeded by an accent or dialect.		Student exhibits deficits in expressive and receptive language, which impede communication.
Pragmatic skills such as interpreting facial expressions, appropriate physical proximity, and use and interpretation of gestures are age appropriate.		Student demonstrates difficulty using and interpreting nonverbal language, often leading to social problems.

## What Can Be Done to Reduce Disproportionate Representation?



## INVEST in TEACHERS Utah's greatest educational resource!

\* "We don't feel adequately prepared to instruct these students and we need a set of sound early interventions and strategies that allow us to make the content more comprehensible for students who have diverse learning abilities."



### Investing in Teachers: Some Solutions (Burnette, 1998)

- \* Provide compensated professional development in methodologies that distinguish the characteristics of a disability from that of cultural differences.
- \* Be open to using old monies in new ways to support teacher training.
- \* Review traditional school practices, identify factors that contribute to student difficulties and failure, and abolish those practices that are the cause.
- \* Train staff in understanding and respecting diverse family networks and child rearing traditions.

### Invent opportunities to promote FAMILY involvement!

\*We must understand that parents' reluctance to meet with teachers may be due to prior negative experiences in school, feeling inadequate due to little or no schooling, apprehension because of poor English, and/or cultural difference.



#### Promoting Family Involvement: Some Solutions (Burnette, 1998)

- \*Provide options that match families' motivations, interests and abilities and that communicate respect and appreciation for families' culture.
- \*Include family members beyond the parents who are involved in daily child rearing.
- \*Translate documents for families who do not communicate easily in English.

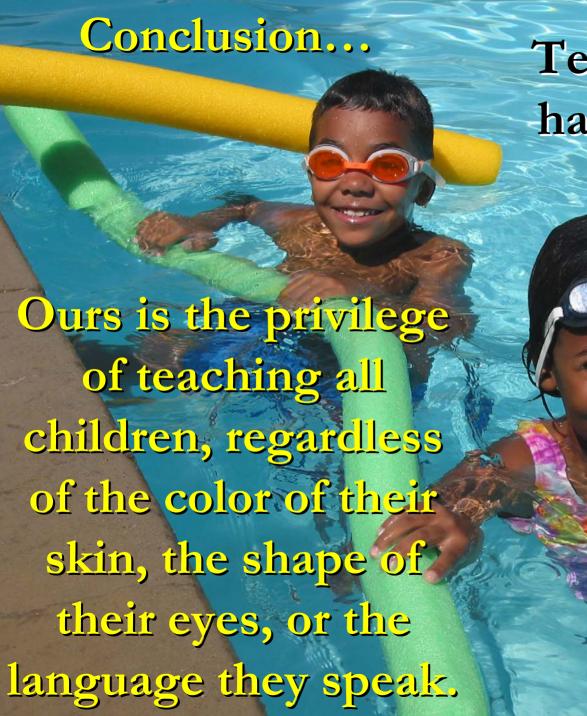
#### Inspire Your Teaching Attitude & Others

\*We must recognize our ability to improve and our students potential to achieve.



#### Inspiring Your Attitude: Some Solutions

- \*Be open to addressing student cultural and linguistic differences in your classroom.
- \* During training be patient and optimistic when the change process rubs against life-long anchored beliefs about teaching and learning.
- \* Recognize the possibilities in yourself, your colleagues, and your students.
- \* Help your students see their potential and attain it.



Teaching, after all, happens one child at a time.