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SPED 756

M6 Activity: Critically Thinking About FAPE, NDE, and LRE

Disproportionality is the tendency for culturally and linguistically diverse students to be overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in gifted and talented programs related to the overall student population. For example, black boys are more likely to be enrolled in special education and less likely to be in honors classes compared to their peers (Toldson, n.d.). It can also refer to the fact that students from culturally and linguistically diverse groups can be identified more frequently as having more severe disabilities than other groups.

Disproportionality is a concern because it leads to services and supports that students do not require. It also can lead to stigmatization for the student receiving services. It also puts limits on the rigor of the curriculum the student has access to. Black (2015) also points out that historically, identifying students as requiring special education was common when school districts want to avoid desegregating schools and classrooms.

As this relates to free appropriate public education, students who are misidentified are being denied access to the appropriate education for them. If a student who belongs in the general education setting without any accommodations or modifications is identified as needing services, they are not receiving the education that they are entitled to. In a case of underrepresentation in gifted or honors classes, the student is being denied access to their appropriate education by not allowing them into those classes or programs. In terms of least restrictive environment, students who are being identified as having more severe disabilities are being placed in more restrictive environments than are necessary, infringing on their right to the least restrictive environment. Since these students are being misidentified, they are not receiving a nondiscriminatory evaluation. Nondiscriminatory evaluations would lead to correct identification and representative identification, so no group would be more or less likely than any other to be identified as requiring services.

Some may think that economic status is a contributing factor, but Waitoller (2015) points out that poverty is not an accurate predictor for minorities’ representation in special education. Contributing factors to identification for gifted and talented programs are cultural differences, fewer academic or extracurricular opportunities, and stereotypic or lower expectations. Many districts still have inappropriate assessment policies that lead to incorrect placement for students from diverse backgrounds. Local policy can also be a contributing where funding issues lead to large class sizes or limited intervention programs leading to less attention to students or students falling further behind.

References

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