Goals for Today

1. Provide an overview of the update process
2. Identify points of emphasis of the manual
3. Review how the information in the manual can be used for settings seeking to assess and improve assessment practices for American Indian and African American students
4. Identify resources for use with strengthening school climate, staff training or within individualized assessment of American Indian and African American students
Part of the Reducing Bias Project


- Why the manual: to address concerns about over-representation of American Indian students in special education programs in public schools in Minnesota.

Recent News

Minneapolis Star Tribune:
In Minnesota, Race Drives School Labels, Discipline
http://www.startribune.com/local/minnesota/235894531.html

NASP COMMUNIQUE:
Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality in Education
January/February 2014

Concept of Over-representation

- Council for Exceptional Children, “over-representation in special education occurs when a group’s membership in the program is larger than the percentage of that group in the educational system or within a given disability category (e.g., learning disability, cognitive disability, emotional disturbance, etc.).
Disproportionate Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Disproportionality</th>
<th>Disproportionate Representation and Overrepresentation of racial/ethnic Groups in special education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overrepresentation in general</td>
<td>Overrepresentation of inappropriate identification of special education identification</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Disability Categories: DCD</td>
<td>6 Disability Categories: DCD</td>
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<td>SLD, E/BD, OHD, ASD, SPL</td>
<td>SLD, E/BD, OHD, ASD, SPL</td>
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<th>Particular Educational Setting</th>
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<td>Suspension/expulsion for 10 or more days</td>
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Based on numeric data only, 3 consecutive years of disproportionate representation (determined annually based upon numeric data and compliance information) leads to 15% set-aside of federal special education funds.

High School Graduation Rates (2011)

High School Graduation Rates (2011) by State and Race/Ethnicity
Drop Out Rates

Minnesota (2012)

Total Dropout Percentage  5.1%

American Indian  18.3%
African American (Black)  9.3%
Caucasian (White)  3.6%
Special Education  9.8%

SUMMARY OF DATA INVOLVING AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS

1% of US population

2.3% of MN population

The lowest graduating rate of any racial ethnic group at only 45%

The highest dropout rate of any racial/ethnic group

In Minnesota, where they represent approximately 2% of the student population, they are over-represented in Developmental Cognitive Disabilities (4%), Specific Learning Disabilities (4%), Developmental Disabilities (4.1%) and Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (6.3%).

Post-Secondary information about American Indian youth who have graduated high school reveal they have one of the lowest rates of obtaining competitive employment at 32.7%, the lowest rate in enrolling in higher education programs at 9% and the highest rate of not being engaged in any program at 45%.
SUMMARY OF DATA INVOLVING AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS

Risk Factors that may be associated with the low school achievement of American Indian youth:

- Stress associated with socioeconomic issues
- Learning style differences that are not identified
- Curriculums not sensitive to culture
- Lack of adequate funding for diversity initiatives
- Testing bias
- Low student self-concept
- Lack of teacher and administrator training on diversity
- Loss of parent motivation through conflict with educators
- Loss of student motivation when not connected to school
- Lack of understanding by teachers (and school staff members) of cultural differences
- Lack of teacher and administrator training on diversity

SUMMARY OF DATA INVOLVING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

US: 15%
MN: 10%

One of the lowest graduation rates and highest school dropout rates in Minnesota as well as in our surrounding states

Lowest scores in reading and one of the lowest scores in math

Highest rates of out-of-school suspension

41% of all school discipline incidents

SUMMARY OF DATA INVOLVING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

23% of students receiving EBD services.

Also over-represented in programs for SLD, DCD, Other Health Disabilities and Developmental Disabilities

AA students receiving SpEd services have a lower high school graduation rate.
Assumption

❖ There are no easy solutions. Change of disproportionate representation involves a systemic perspective involving a review of school climate, determining the presence or absence of pro-active intervention programs, understanding attitudes about racial and ethnic differences, supporting educator preparation to work cross-culturally, review of assessment decision-making, and relationships between educators, administrators, caregivers, and community advocates.

THE SCHOOL BUILDING AND STAFF

❖ Efforts to reduce disproportionate representation of American Indian and African American students require a systemic approach.
❖ A systemic approach involves continuous professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, recognition and support of diverse learning styles, assessment of cultural ways of knowing, and involvement of community in special education programs.
❖ Resources are assessed, staff attitudes are addressed, and building functional relationships with caregivers is established as a specific strategy used by educators and administrators.
❖ The school becomes a community in which all who impact the child, both within and outside the school, work to facilitate the child’s positive adjustment.

BIOECOLOGICAL MODEL: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITY OF THE WHOLE CHILD
What educators now understand is that heredity does not produce “finished traits” but rather interacts with environmental experience in determining developmental outcomes (Brofenbrenner & Ceci, 1994 p. 5719).

Not only is environment the immediate setting, but in the broader sense includes structures of ethnicity, culture, subculture, social class, communication patterns, and other unique factors.

Questions to Consider to Help Develop a Bioecological Understanding
- Consider the ecological system of one of your diverse students in your setting.
- What components of the child’s system do you need to learn more about?
- What source(s) might provide the most valid information?
- How can this information help build upon the student’s background information?
- How can this information inform your instruction and understanding?
- How is parent/community involvement supported?

How do educators, administrators, and caregivers...
- ...raise the student achievement of our American Indian and African American and students?
- ...use culturally responsive teaching in creating high expectations for students?
- ...come to understand, honor, and incorporate the ways in which family culture shapes student’s academic life?

What can we do so that in classrooms the culture and climate reflect the diversity of the community? How can our systems unite to prepare each student to become a contributing community member?
Teaching is both a science and an art that requires organizational skills and a refined set of professional skills. As Goddard et al., (2000) point out, the collective will and skills of educators and staff contribute to the overall school culture, creating either a healthy or toxic school climate.

**SCHOOL CLIMATE**

A healthy school culture:
Educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of all their students to achieve success, and they pass that belief on to others...they create policies, practices, and procedures that support their belief in the ability of every student.

A toxic school culture:
Educators believe that student success is based on student’s level of concern, attentiveness, prior knowledge, and willingness to comply with the demands of the school, and they articulate that belief in overt and covert ways. In a toxic school culture, educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the impossibility of universal achievement.

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF CLIMATE TO A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ECOLOGICAL LEARNING COMMUNITY**

“Culture counts” and “is at the heart of all we do in the name of education, whether that is instruction, curriculum, administration or performance assessment (Gay, 2010, p. 8).
The fundamental change in our assumptions and approach is to shift our goal from the concept of bringing in culture into education to making sure that education is integrated with culture as a new whole.

For example, no longer would it be bringing in isolated cultural events to celebrate a “day” or month, such as Black History Month, but rather the entire culture, climate, environment, curriculum, instruction is integrated into the daily life and fabric of the school/classroom.

WHAT IS SCHOOL CLIMATE?

The National School Climate Center defines school climate as “…the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students’, parents’ and school personnel’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.”

DEFINITION OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

Positive School Climate

| Norms, values, & expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe |
| Members of the school community who are engaged and respected |
| Students, families, and educators that work together to develop & contribute to a shared school vision |
| Educators who model & nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits & satisfaction that can be gained from learning |
| Members of the school community who contribute to the operations of the school & the care of the physical environment |
FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE

High performing schools scored consistently higher across all domains than mid and low performing schools.

Lower performing schools on the other hand, had significant themes that were found with their results:

- Deficit beliefs about students
- Lowered expectations about student attainment
- Lack of shared responsibility and accountability among staff
- Curriculums were less rigorous
- Policies were often inequitable
- Disproportionality was found in discipline use
- Overrepresentation in special education programs

(Lynn Smith, Ph.D. Bethune Institute)

WHAT CAN SCHOOL STAFF DO?

- The positive and caring attitudes of all school staff members seem to be the factors that most influence academic achievement and appropriate behavior.
- School climate reforms will make a significant impact on school success of African American students.
- Teachers and administrators who expect and express high expectations of their students in a positive manner will see greater student gains and performance.
- Every student is a capable learner and can achieve, both academically and behaviorally to their highest potential, must be an intrinsic belief of every teacher and administrator.
- Poverty, family stressors, cultural, ethnic or racial backgrounds are not an excuse for a student’s underachievement or failing to hold high expectations for social skills.
Schools can conduct comprehensive surveys and checklists to determine student, staff, and community perceptions of various aspects of school climate (e.g., building and teacher quality, policies, supports, family engagement), including cultural awareness and knowledge of the staff.

- The American School Climate Survey for Students and for Teachers (2006).
- The ASSC Climate Survey (2004).
- The Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (2007).

Aggregated and disaggregated data by population on attendance rates, discipline referrals, tardiness, graduation rates, college acceptance, and test scores as well as staff attendance patterns and turnover.

Once teams have initial data, developing systems and policies and utilizing resources to address concerns becomes the next step. Assessment tools can be used to collect data at regular intervals to measure intervention effectiveness and to inform additional school climate modifications.

Every staff member in the school building is responsible for every student.

This implies the use of more creative methods to individualize instruction and provide additional support for academics, social skills, and self-regulation.

- Parent engagement strategies and programs are essential in students achieving to their potential. Parents must become an integral partner in the school and the district by being members of all significant curriculum committees, and participating on policy decision-committees.

- Everyone in the school must feel welcome, safe, respected, and self-confident.

- Trained cultural liaison staff can have a direct positive impact on students, parents, teachers and administrators. Understanding other cultures will help all involved to establish trusting relationships that will help students in the learning process.

One effective and free tool for faculty and staff to assess their implicit bias is through Project Implicit Association Tool on Social Attitudes.

The free website assessment tool can be used to get a glimpse of personal biases that persons are unaware they possess.

Another example of an assessment tool on attitudes and beliefs is the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) http://mdbroup.com/idi-background.html
THE SCHOOL BUILDING AND STAFF

- Professional development focusing on the cultures of the school is another important step to improve universal school climate.
- Reading groups or book clubs can facilitate greater understanding of a culture.
- Other topic materials include stories on Freedom Riders and discussion of impact of slavery.

SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

- Policies define expectations and consequences and can relate to feelings and practices around diversity in the school, bullying, discipline, academic standards, etc.
- It is important for building level leadership teams representing all groups or professionals and support staff to review all school policies and determine if they are meeting the needs of the school and of every student.
- As of 2013, 22% of Minnesota schools have been involved in systematic training and implementation of school-wide PBIS.
- It is essential that critical elements of culturally responsive teaching, classrooms, and social, emotional, and behavioral supports are included within this broader framework.

SCHOOL CLIMATE: AN ADMINISTRATOR’S PERSPECTIVE

- Theoretically, a toxic school climate can, unintentionally, exclude specific groups of people and may limit student access to education and reduce student achievement.
- Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan recently reminds us, “Education is the civil rights issue of our generation. The undeniable truth is that the everyday education experience for too many students of color violates the principle of equity at the heart of the American promise.”
No excuses
Raise expectations
Community of accountability

Reflecting on our own biases, stereotypes, and educational practices. Educators and school staff must be willing to engage in Courageous Conversations with their professional peers, caregivers, and the community at large. In all aspects of our profession, educators must be willing to stay engaged, experience discomfort and speak the truth (Singleton and Linton, 2006). With an approach of no excuses for inability to make change, school communities end blame of caregivers, close conversations that center on the futility of a lesson, and retire negative assumptions about student motivation (Carter, 2000).

Assessment Goals

The initial step in nondiscriminatory assessment is also the most important: conduct the assessment with the express purpose of linking the results to intervention. It is important to recognize that even after the assessment has been completed, the examinee is not suddenly or magically going to be “cured” of his or her learning problems merely because a diagnosis or label has been applied. Therefore, the role of assessment should not be viewed as one that is limited to identification or classification only, rather it should be extended to inform appropriate instructional interventions, modifications, and program development (Ortiz, 2008 – best practices in nondiscriminatory assessment ppt.)

Multi-Tiered System of Support Model

**Tier 1.** Universal instruction and experiences (all students receive/experience)
- Prevention and early intervention
- Positive school climate
- School-wide data collection/assessment
- Staff self-reflect on potential bias, vulnerability

**Tier 2.** Focused assessment, instruction, or intervention
- Gather specific data on student acculturation, family, learning ecology & small group interventions

**Tier 3.** Targeted assessment and intervention
- Individualized assessment techniques lead to instructional recommendations, clear consideration of student acculturation, qualitative interpretations of data, and building on student strengths.
Multi-Tiered System of Support Model

Recent literature has supported RTI and PBS in reducing the disproportionate number of diverse learners being served at the most intense levels of services (e.g., Special Education placement).

In order to improve and maintain a positive school climate, strategies that support diverse beliefs and values are employed. Positive school climate has been found to be correlated with improved academic and behavioral outcomes for all students, including diverse learners, and can be viewed as a powerful preventative system.

Tier 1 strategies must be viewed as universal – for all students - and preventative. Tier 1 must include evidence-based instructional strategies that address varied and diverse approaches to learning.

Assessment of cognitive ability and general problem solving in early Tier 1 and Tier 2 stages is driven by questions about how to assist a child in their development of knowledge and skills, and methods to support the child’s family and teacher.

Issues of special education eligibility occur when universal instruction and prevention programs have failed to meet the needs of the student.

Tools for educators

Based on Ortiz’s best practices in nondiscriminatory assessment (2008), the Learning Ecology Checklist helps educators start by considering multiple ecological or environmental hypotheses.

Additional tools that help educators better understand external influences on a student or school include the Bias Vulnerability Checklist and the Socio-Cultural Checklist & Guide.

These tools involve educator self-reflection and analysis of the school’s environment, with the mindset that school culture and school climate influence the progress of individual students.
Multi-Tiered System of Support Model

Effective problem-solving strategies in Tiers 1 and 2

High percentage of challenges can be prevented & disproportional representation in special education minimized

- When a student’s acculturation status (i.e., family and community experiences) has been evaluated as being similar to the American mainstream, use of traditional tests may be given consideration.
- However, for many American Indian and African American students, experiences at home or in the community are unique and not consistent with test construction or norm sample make-up of many standardized measures.

Reducing BIAS

Ortiz (2008) cautioned that:

"... the goal isn’t to eliminate all bias or find unbiased tests—this is unlikely and impractical. Rather, the goal is toward reduction of bias to the maximum extent possible. After data are collected from standardized administrations, examiners may then adapt and modify tests in order to secure additional qualitative information about functioning that is extremely useful in instructional planning (Ortiz, 2008)."

TEST Selection

Assessment Tool Selection Guide
- This guide does not assume that a standardized test will or must be used; rather it is offered as a guide for if or when testing is deemed appropriate.
- Because no technique is likely to be free from bias, the guide should not be viewed as a process from which a faultless single instrument can be determined.
- The guide provides a system by which the cultural and linguistic content and expectations in existing tests can be evaluated.
- This process may lead to one or more instruments being chosen as fairer options for the individual student in question. Or, it may lead to a team decision to minimize weight associated with the use of nationally standardized tests for some children.
Understanding Bias in Assessment

Poverty  Multiple Transitions
Experience of Racism  Family Disruption

Considering Acculturation

Ortiz and Dynda (2005) defined acculturation as "an individual’s general acquisition and learning of the cultural elements of the society in which he or she is being raised (p. 548)."

Ortiz (2008) clarified this notion when stating that educators "...must be sensitive to the fact that important differences exist with respect to child-rearing practices, expectations and aspirations, language experiences, and availability of and involvement in information and formal learning experiences...[p. 666-667]."

RESOURCES
- NASP Position Paper on Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality in Education
  www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/position_paper.aspx
RESOURCES