

RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Racial disproportionality in special education refers to the identification and/or disciplining of students from any racial/ethnic subgroup at significantly higher rates than their peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

MYTHS

1 “Poverty explains racial disproportionality in special education”

2 “Legal and policy guidelines in the United States ensure adequate educational opportunities for students with disabilities”

3 “Students of color, particularly, African American students, are under-represented in special education”

WHAT WE KNOW



Despite important legal and policy advances, differential educational opportunities (e.g., access to high quality teachers) and outcomes (e.g., academic achievement) for students with disabilities occur **BASED ON RACE, INCOME, LANGUAGE, GENDER, AND DISABILITY CATEGORIES**^{5,6,7,8}



There is not one factor that explains racial disproportionality. Instead, racial disproportionality **VARIES BY STATE, DISTRICT, GEOGRAPHY, GRADE LEVEL, AND DISABILITY CATEGORY**^{9,10,11,12}



Racial disproportionality is a **COMPLEX PHENOMENON** that should not be simplified as either under- or over-representation in special education for any racial/ethnic or linguistic population¹³. For example, examining within-group differences of emergent bilinguals¹⁴ (e.g., proficiency in native language and language support program) create more nuanced understandings of disproportionality

KEY TAKEAWAY: Racial disproportionality is a complex (special) education equity challenge that requires a multidimensional approach that looks beyond isolated student traits such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.