



**A STATE PROFILE OF EFFORTS TO
CREATE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS**

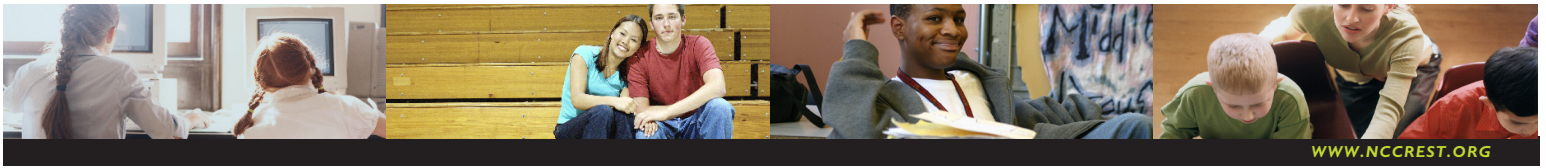
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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS FOR ALL



NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Culturally Responsive
Educational Systems

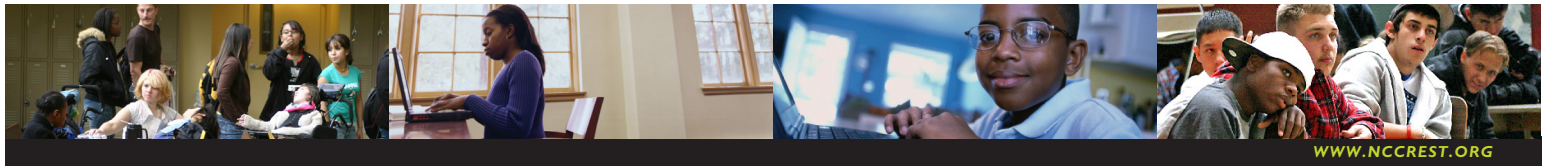
NCCREST



THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) is a technical assistance and dissemination project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSEP). The mission of NCCRESt is to support state and local school systems to assure a quality, culturally responsive education for all students. NCCRESt provides technical assistance and professional development to close the achievement gap between students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their peers, and to reduce inappropriate referrals to special education. NCCRESt is designed to coalesce students, families, practitioners, policy makers and researchers around interventions and strategic improvements in practice and policy that are culturally responsive. Culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the belief that culturally and linguistically diverse students can excel in academic endeavors if their culture, language, heritage, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate their learning and development and if they are provided with access to high quality teachers, programs, curricula, and resources. The outcomes of NCCRESt's work are intended to (a) increase the use of prevention and early intervention strategies, (b) improve the contexts for educational systems improvement, and (c) enhance the teaching and learning of practitioners and students alike. This initiative was designed to support and extend the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which emphasizes stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.

Established in November of 2002, the Center has been effective in accomplishing its goals, establishing itself as a source of technical assistance and dissemination for issues related to disproportionality in special education. It has created links with other initiatives focused on disproportionality in special education, specifically the Civil Rights Project, the Monarch Center, and Project LASER. NCCRESt has worked with educators in all fifty states and six territories. The framework directs attention not only to processes within special education but to a broader view of the kinds of classroom environments and instructional approaches that are necessary to educate culturally and linguistically diverse students. An analysis of the most recent annual reports of progress by states to OSEP confirms that NCCRESt has been a resource to states as they improve their ability to educate students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. NCCRESt's conceptual framework has provided a scaffold for developing our technical assistance and dissemination strategies.



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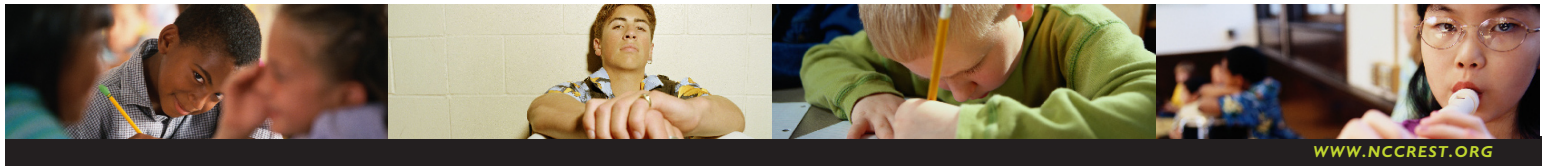
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National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems

A State Profile of Efforts to Create Culturally Responsive Educational Systems

WISCONSIN

April 2008

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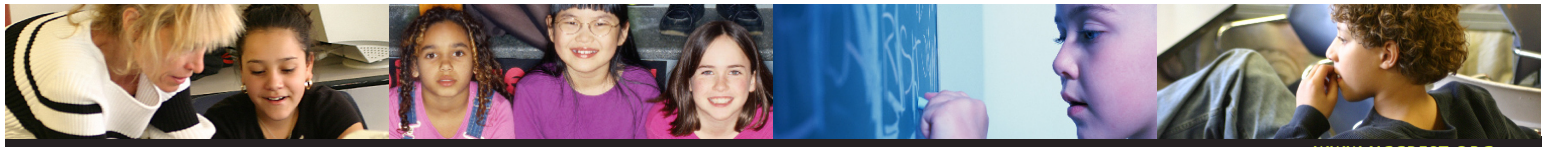


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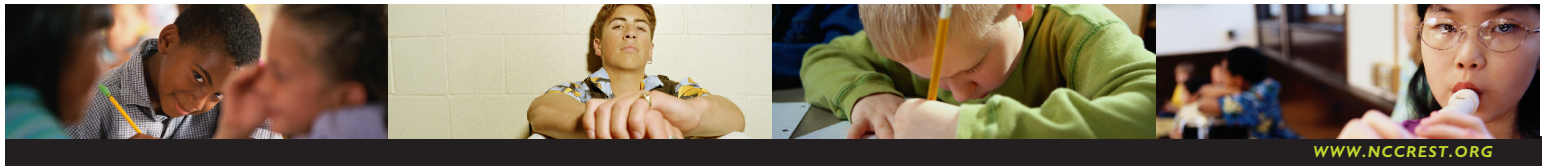
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose. This report provides a snapshot of Wisconsin's efforts to address the disproportionate representation of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) in special education. We use NCCREST's conceptual framework for culturally responsive educational systems which focuses on the connections between people, policies, and practices. The framework provides an evidence based schema for analyzing the relationships among federal, state, and local policy implementation in special education. The NCCREST framework focuses on how these relationships impact opportunities to learn, equity, and educational outcomes for students who are CLD as well as how they affect the practitioners employed within the system.

Questions. In preparing this report, we explored the various factors related to the development of culturally responsive systems. In doing so, we asked a number of questions: What is the current context of education in the state? How has the socio-political history of the state shaped the current political, social, and educational landscapes? How are the data from the various domains related? What do they tell us about issues of race and equity? What efforts are being made to create more equitable systems? How are these efforts being reflected in the data? What more needs to be done to create culturally responsive systems?

The Importance of Context. The development of culturally responsive systems must be understood within the socio-historical context of the nation and the individual state. The disproportionate representation of students who are CLD in special education, inequitable opportunities to learn, and disparities in educational outcomes are manifestations of the inequity of the system as a whole, and are related to inequity in other systems (e.g. socioeconomics, health care, etc.). In attempting to understand educational inequity, we explore the cultural history of the state because it is critical in shaping the continued marginalization of students from CLD backgrounds in today's educational systems.

Demographics. Wisconsin is home to over 5.5 million people, nearly 90% of which are White. The student population of Wisconsin is somewhat more diverse than the state as a whole, with 21% coming from CLD backgrounds. While there has been an overall downward trend in student enrollment over the last decade, with enrollment decreasing from approximately 881,500 in 1997 to 863,500 in 2004, the proportion of students identified as CLD is steadily increasing, and is now up 5% since 1996, with the population of English language learners doubling in the last decade.

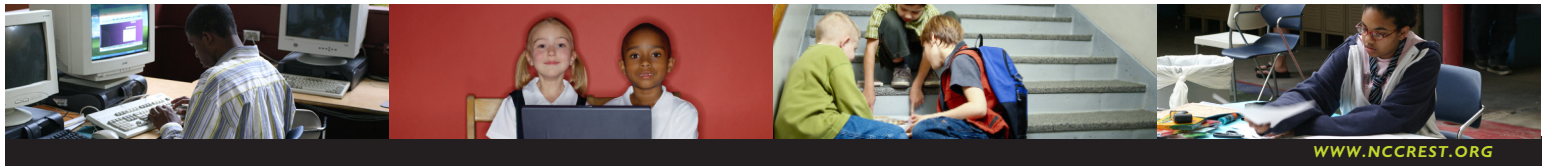
The Data. The academic and behavioral outcomes for students identified as CLD continue to fall behind their White peers in Wisconsin. For instance, compared to White students, students identified as CLD are less likely to

meet proficiency requirements on state assessments, enroll in AP courses, or graduate high school. At the same time, they are more likely to be retained, suspended, and expelled. Nearly 14% of all Wisconsin students are identified for special education, with students identified as Black and American Indian being substantially more likely to be identified in the high-incidence disability categories. Specifically, students identified as Black are 2.2 times more likely to be identified as cognitively disabled, 1.71 times more likely to be emotionally disabled, and 1.35 times more likely to be learning disabled than their White peers. Students identified as American Indian are 1.36 times more likely to be cognitively disabled, 1.72 times more likely to be learning disabled, and 3.25 times more likely to be emotionally disabled than White students, the latter of which is substantially higher than their relative risk nationally. For this group, risk has been slowly rising since 2002 in most categories; results are scattered for other groups. On a positive note, in recent years, Wisconsin has steadily increased the overall proportion of students identified as having disabilities who are educated in the least restrictive environment, with the proportion of students identified as having disabilities educated in the general education classroom for the majority of their time increasing from 41.5% in 1999 to 50.83% in 2004. However, students identified as CLD are also more likely to be placed in more segregated environments, with students identified as Black, American Indian, and Hispanic being less likely than students identified as White to spend the majority of their time in regular education classrooms.

Leadership for Change. When the current state superintendent of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WDPI), Elizabeth Burmaster, took office in 2001, she announced the "New Wisconsin Promise" to ensure access to quality education for all children through a commitment to effective student services, special education, and prevention programs. Since 2005, WDPI has engaged in a number of activities designed to address the problem of disproportionality in the state's public schools, including the funding of the Discretionary Disproportionality Project and of the Disproportionality Workgroup, the annual Summer Institute on Disproportionality, and the state's ongoing affiliation with NCCREST. Administrators and educators have received training in various aspects of disproportionality, culturally responsive educational practices, and school improvement.

Analysis. Wisconsin's efforts to improve the quality of education for all students are commendable. Nevertheless, there is much work to be done in order to address the gaps in educational outcomes and provide high quality educational opportunities to all children. The recent systems-change initiative, Responsive Education for All Children (REACH), has the potential to do so, as it includes technical assistance centers to develop tools and provide training in data-based decision making and evidence-based prevention and intervention.

While there have been several professional learning opportunities around



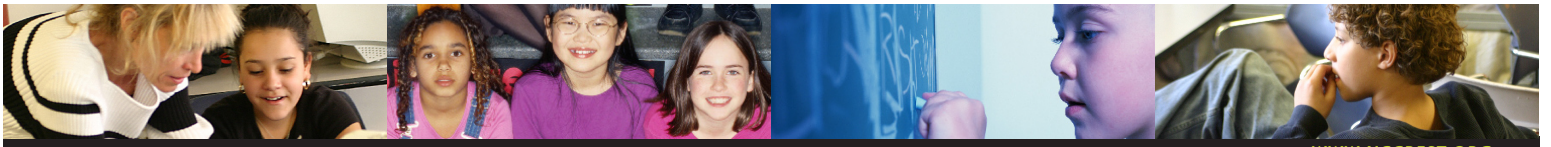
cultural responsiveness, it is unclear how this knowledge will permeate district, school, and classroom practice since there is no policy mandate to do so. Professional learning alone is insufficient for systemic change in policies, procedures, and practice. The state's most recent efforts to address disproportionality and culturally responsive education, the Summer Institutes and other initiatives by Disproportionality Workgroup, have included less than 10% of districts. Presently, district improvement plans for reducing disproportionality are not integrated into general improvement plans. Work to address the treatment of culturally and linguistically diverse students identified as having disabilities is outside the realm of general practice. Moreover, the assumption that redressing disproportionality through narrowly targeted efforts to teach personnel new ways of operating ignores the influence of systemic inequality in shaping the disproportionality problem and is unlikely to effect systemic change because the personnel will continue to operate within a biased system.

Recommendations. We recommend some specific areas of improvement in moving towards the development of culturally responsive educational systems:

1. The improvement plans districts submit to the state should be inclusive of their disproportionality work. Disproportionality is an issue of the educational system as a whole and must be addressed as such. Relegating it to the realm of special education ignores the various facets of the issue and hinders systems change efforts.
2. There must be coordinated systems of professional learning that include content around disproportionality, in addition to literacy, behavior support, evidence-based practice, etc.
3. There must be a thoughtful discourse around the skills, outcomes and capacities of the state's personnel licensure programs in ensuring that teachers are equipped to produce results for students identified as CLD.
4. The state must have a long-term plan for addressing disproportionality. Will relative risk ratios of 2 always be regarded as an acceptable level of disparity, or will there be an expectation of parity? If so, how will this goal be supported by the state?
5. The state must examine inequity and marginalization in other systems (e.g. economy, health care, etc.) as they relate and contribute to disproportionality in special education. Comprehensive systemic change requires the coordination of multiple systems. Because educational inequity occurs within a broader context, it is unlikely that real parity can ever be achieved if the disparity in related systems persists and goes unaddressed. This requires coordinated efforts between the educational, economic, health care, and other systems.

Promoting equitable systems is a monumental task that Wisconsin has begun working towards. Raising awareness and asking the tough questions, providing high-quality instruction and evidence-based early intervening

services to all students, and employing culturally responsive practices are critical. Policy must be translated to practice in ways that lead to systemic changes at all levels of the educational system – state, regional, district, school, and classroom. We are optimistic that with persistent, coordinated efforts, systemic change that supports the learning of all students can be fostered.



INTRODUCTION





INTRODUCTION

What is this Report About?

This report provides a snapshot of Wisconsin’s efforts to provide for the education of students identified as having disabilities and students identified as coming from CLD backgrounds.¹ We use NCCREST’s conceptual framework for culturally responsive educational systems, which focuses on the connections between people, policies, and practices, providing a schema

Figure 1. Inside This Report

Inside This Report	
CREATING CONTEXT	
	National
	State
PEOPLE	
	Students
	Special Education Identification and Placement Patterns
	Educators
	Educational Outcomes
POLICY	
	Governance
	General Education
	Accountability & High Stakes Testing
	Teacher Certification
	School Choice
	Charter Schools
	Chapter 220
	New Wisconsin Promise
	Special Education
	Least Restrictive Environment
	Disproportionality
PRACTICES	
	General Education
	Special Education
	Least Restrictive Environment
	Disproportionality
	NCCREST State Partner Activities

for analyzing the relationships between federal, state, district, and school policies. As Klingner and colleagues (2005) state:

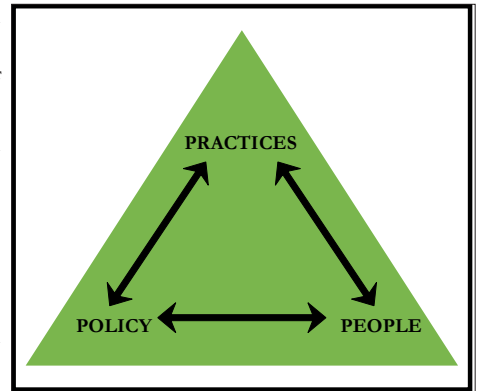
Policies include those guidelines enacted at federal, state, district, and school levels that influence funding, resource allocation, accountability, and other key aspects of schooling. We use the notion of practice in two ways, in the instrumental sense of daily practices that all cultural beings engage in to navigate and survive their worlds, and also in a technical sense to describe the procedures and strategies devised for the purpose of maximizing students’ learning outcomes. People include all those in the broad educational system: administrators, teacher educators, teachers, community members, families, and the children whose opportunities we wish to improve (p. 2).

Our goal is to use this framework to understand how the relationships between these domains impact opportunities to learn, equity, and educational outcomes for students and their families as well as how they affect the practitioners employed within the system.² Our conceptual framework conveys the interrelatedness of these three domains—that is, that each domain affects and is affected by the others (see Figures 1 and 2). This dynamic creates a complex interplay that must be examined to understand the current context of inequity in education and culturally responsive educational systems. The information presented in this report underscores the complexity and difficulty of this work.

In preparing this report, we explore the various factors related to the development of culturally responsive systems. In doing so, we asked a number of questions: What is the current context of education in the state? How has the socio-political history of the state shaped the current political, social, and educational landscapes? How are the data from the various domains related? What do they tell us about issues of race and equity? What efforts are being made to create more equitable systems? How are these efforts being reflected in the data? What more needs to be done to create culturally responsive systems?

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Data for this report were compiled from a variety of sources including websites, government documents, and reports. Specific references are provided in footnotes for each section of the document. The report relies heavily on data from the Wisconsin



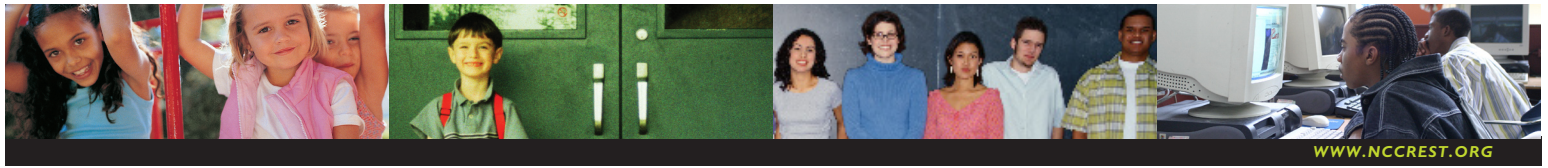
Department of Public Instruction (WDPI) and draws from a variety of other sources including the US Census, American Community Survey, Wisconsin newspapers, Wisconsin state department, and scholarly publications. Data in this report represent the most current publicly available data, which may not be the most up-to-date.

Creating Context

Efforts to create culturally responsive educational systems must be understood within the socio-historical context of the nation and the individual state. The disproportionate representation of students identified as CLD in our nation’s schools, inequity in opportunities to learn, and the disparity in educational outcomes are manifestations of the inequity of the system as a whole and is related to inequity in other systems (e.g. socioeconomics, health care, etc.). The marginalization of individuals from CLD backgrounds is not isolated to

¹ This report uses the five federal racial categories (White, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian/Pacific Islander) as general terms that include people from a variety of cultural, national, linguistic, and racial backgrounds because these are the labels used by the state and because this is a federally funded project. However, we recognize the inherent limitations of this terminology in reflecting the racial origin or complexity of people who are culturally and linguistically diverse. We acknowledge that these terms may not be preferred by the groups themselves, and may even be offensive to many, as they reflect generalities made by dominant society. We use these census department categories in spite of the notion that race is an old fashioned construct—we both use it to understand what is going on and want to deconstruct it so that racial boundaries that are so much of the US cultural history are rendered useless to define who any one person is or to portray any one person or group as being or having static membership and histories.

² Klingner, J., Artiles, A., Kozleski, E. B., Utley, C., Zion, S., Tate, W., Harry, B., Zamora-Durán, G., & Riley, D. (2005). Conceptual framework for addressing the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students identified as having disabilities. Educational Policy Analysis Archives, 13, 38, Retrieved September 9, 2005 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n38/>



the educational system. In attempting to understand educational inequity, we explore the national and state context because it is a critical factor in the continued marginalization of students identified as CLD in today's educational systems.

National Context

In examining the contextual factors that impact Wisconsin's educational system, we must acknowledge that there is a national context that affects what goes on at the state level. Throughout the nation, the proportion of students identified as CLD is rapidly increasing. One issue that resonates nationwide is the disparity between the qualifications and experiences of teachers in affluent communities and those in high-poverty, urban areas, in addition to the decreasing diversity of the teaching and professional force.^{3,4} Much of the field is unprepared to provide appropriate, powerful opportunities to learn for students from diverse backgrounds.

In the four decades since Dunn⁵ first called attention to the overrepresentation of students from CLD backgrounds in classes for the mentally retarded, these students have consistently been found to be disproportionately represented in special education. In general, the risk of special education identification has increased for students of all ethnic backgrounds since the passage of IDEA, but the increases have been greatest for students who are CLD.

States' educational systems are also heavily impacted by federal policy. Two federal policies of particular interest to this report are the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Act, which are discussed below. This powerful legislation affects policies and practices at every level of educational systems—state, district, school, classroom, and individual.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 is a comprehensive reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. NCLB redefines the federal role in K-12 education with the goals of improving student achievement and reducing the gap between the achievement of students from CLD backgrounds and their White peers. The legislation is based on four arenas: (1) accountability for results, (2) emphasis on scientifically-based practice, (3) parental options, and (4) local control and flexibility. States must measure students' progress in math, reading, and science through assessments aligned with state academic content and standards, provide student data to parents, and offer detailed report cards about schools and districts, disaggregating the achievement data by race/ethnicity, language, SES, and disability status. NCLB requires states to identify schools that are not meeting adequate

NCLB & IDEA

Two federal policies of particular interest to this report are the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Act. This powerful legislation affects policies and practices at every level of educational systems—state, district, school, classroom, and individual.

yearly progress (AYP), apply a set of interventions and sanctions, and allow students in low-performing schools to transfer to higher-performing schools or receive supplemental educational services. Even though NCLB increased federal control in education, states have autonomy when defining their criteria for academic success.

While NCLB has focused public and professional attention on the outcomes of education through annual measurement of student progress, a focus on AYP and the disaggregating of test scores, special education services remain much as they were in the eighties and early nineties, with the system experiencing a troublesome and persistent overrepresentation of students identified as CLD, particularly in urban areas. Further, students identified as African-American and Hispanic are more likely than White and Asian/Pacific Islander students to be assigned to more segregated placements. In some parts of the United States, overrepresentation of students from CLD backgrounds in special education also includes American Indians.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originally passed in 1975 as the Education for All Children Handicapped Act (P.L. 94-142), and most recently amended in 2004, guarantees a "free and appropriate" public education for all children. Under the newest regulations, states must also have policies and procedures in place to prevent the inappropriate overrepresentation or disproportionate representation of students identified as CLD in special education. States must collect and examine data to determine if significant disproportionality exists in identification, placement, or discipline. When significant disproportionality is found, states must review and revise policies, procedures, and practices related to identification and placement to ensure compliance with IDEA. Any local education agency identified as having significant disproportionality must also reserve 15% of funds for comprehensive early intervening services.

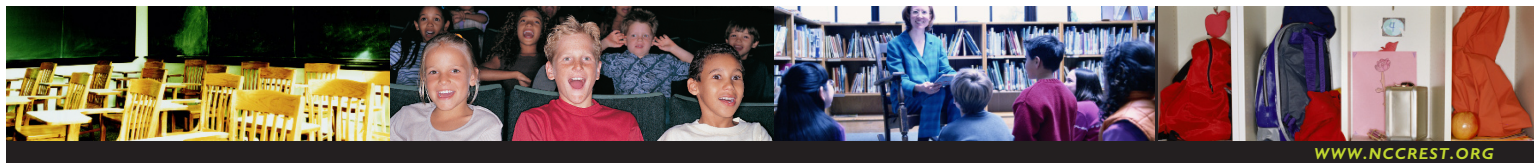
States are employing various strategies to address the disproportionality issue from establishing collaborative task groups of special education and general education practitioners to monitoring special education referrals to tracking special education student placement from year to year. Other strategies include strengthening reading programs for early childhood learners and fully funding programs for students identified as English language learners (ELLs). These solutions to disproportionality, along with others, are grounded in an understanding of the intersection of culture, learning, and disability; the sustained use of research knowledge in professional practice; the means to support teacher learning and enhance students' opportunities to learn; and improved general education instruction in classrooms and through alternative programs (e.g., Title I).

Understanding and addressing disproportionality and inclusive practices goes beyond merely looking at special education data. Rather, it includes examining what is happening in general education classrooms and exploring the operating assumptions upon which educational practices and policies are formed. There are inherent tensions and contradictions that must be

³ American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. (1994). Teacher education pipeline III: Schools, colleges, and departments of education enrollments by race, ethnicity, and gender. Washington, DC: Author.

⁴ Snyder, T. (2002). Digest of Education Statistics 2001. Washington, D. C.: National Center on Education Statistics.

⁵ Dunn, L. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded: Is much of it justifiable? *Exceptional Children*, 35, 5-22.



addressed; understanding disproportionality requires shifts in perceptions and practices for educating all students. States can improve learning opportunities for students by establishing culturally responsive schools and educational systems. Efforts to create culturally responsive schools involves an intricate weave of widely varying beliefs, policies, and practices at all levels—family and community, classroom, school, district, state and federal government, and society at large.

State Context

Geography

Wisconsin is one of the Great Lakes states (see Figure 3). The state is divided into five distinct regions. In the north, the Lake Superior Lowland occupies a belt of land along Lake Superior. Just below that region, the Northern Highland has massive forests as well as thousands of glacial lakes and mountains. The middle of the state is composed of plains, possessing rich farmlands. The Eastern Ridge and Lowlands region in the southeast is home to many of Wisconsin’s largest cities. The Western Uplands in the southwest of the state is a rugged landscape with a mix of forest and farmland.

Figure 3. Map of Wisconsin from <http://wpp.greenwichmeantime.com/images/usa/wisconsin.jpg>



It is important to understand the geographical context and population distribution when analyzing educational systems. Geographical splits impact who has access to resources and can create tensions between rural, urban, and suburban communities, which have important implications for discourse surrounding equity and access. For instance, the school funding systems in most states, including Wisconsin, benefit suburban residents while putting rural and urban communities at a disadvantage because of its basis in property taxes. In some states, this system has resulted in as many as 80% of urban schools being funded at lower rates than suburban systems.⁶ This can affect condition of facilities, recruitment and retention of high-quality faculty and staff, availability of educational materials, and class size, which all contribute

to students’ opportunities to learn, thereby shaping their educational outcomes. So, while Milwaukee may experience numerous challenges in these domains, a suburban area, such as Madison, may not.

Population Demographics

Wisconsin is home to over 5.5 million people.⁷ Nearly 90% are identified as White and approximately 43% claim German ancestry.⁸ People identified as Black are the largest minority group in the state at 5.7% of the total population, or just under 300,000 residents. At 295,000 residents, or 5.6% of the population, people identified as Hispanics are the second largest minority group. Approximately 2%, or 100,000, of the population is identified as Asian/Pacific Islander and almost 1% is identified as American Indian,⁹ encompassing eleven federally-recognized tribes including Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Ojibwa, Potawatomi, Fox, Sauk, Cheyenne, Dakota Sioux, Huron, Illini, and Oneida.¹⁰

Population Distribution.

Despite its reputation for agriculture, 65% of Wisconsin’s population is considered urban, concentrated in the Southeastern parts of the state.¹¹ As of July 2006, the most densely populated counties were Milwaukee, Dane, Waukesha, and Brown County. Significant population growth has been seen in Dane county (8.9% increase), Washington county (8.8%), Walworth county (8.4%), Fox Valley (7.1%), Brown County (7.1%), Outagamie county (7.2%), and Waukesha county (5.2%). The greatest growth has taken place in St. Croix, where the population has increased over 23%.

Understanding and addressing disproportionality and inclusive practices goes beyond merely looking at special education data. Rather, it includes examining what is happening in general education classrooms and exploring the operating assumptions upon which educational practices and policies are formed. There are inherent tensions and contradictions that must be addressed; understanding disproportionality requires shifts in perceptions and practices for educating all students.

Residents from the racial/ethnic minority groups are primarily located in the Southeastern region, Dane and Brown Counties. Specifically, as of 2000, nearly two thirds of the Black population lived in Milwaukee. Nearly two thirds of the Hispanic population was distributed across the Southeastern counties of Rock, Walworth, Racine, Kenosha, Waukesha, and Milwaukee. High proportions of American Indians are found in Brown, Milwaukee, Sawyer, and Shawano Counties.¹²

Cultural Legacy

Wisconsin was first settled nearly 12,000 years ago by peoples identified as nomadic American Indians who survived by hunting and fishing; they were later succeeded by woodland tribes whose cultural ruins can still be found today.¹³ The first people of European ancestry arrived in 1634, led by French explorer Jean Nicolet. The state’s name comes from a French version of an American Indian word believed to mean “homeland.” Peoples identified as Black first came to inhabit Wisconsin in the early 1700s as slaves to the French colonists.

⁶ Anyon, J. (2001). Inner cities, affluent suburbs, and unequal educational opportunity. In J. A. Banks & C.A.M Banks (Eds.), *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (4th ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

⁷ US Census Bureau, July 1, 2005

⁸ American Community Survey 2004

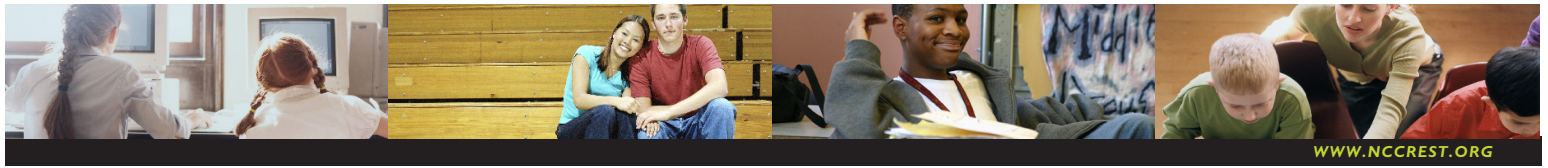
⁹ www.statehealthfacts.org

¹⁰ http://www.native-languages.org/wisconsin.htm

¹¹ http://international.wi.gov/HistoryAndCulture.html

¹² State of Wisconsin. http://www.doa.state.wi.us/demographic/rcounty_nonhisp_view.asp?locid=9

¹³ http://international.wi.gov/HistoryAndCulture.html



The French influence dominated until 1763 when the British gained control following the French and Indian War. For both groups of colonists, the primary interest in the area was the fur trade. There were also some free Black traders. The American government eventually gained control after the Revolutionary War and began forcing the American Indians from their land. In 1783, Wisconsin became part of the United States under the Treaty of Paris, but did not become a state until 1848. Although traditionally led by the native American Indians, lead mining was taken over by colonists and led to an influx of prospectors following a series of treaties that disenfranchised the tribes. The US Indian Removal policy supported efforts to remove several Great Lakes tribes to Kansas and Oklahoma.¹⁴ Many refused, moving into the northern portions of the state, and others returned shortly after. The Menominee and Ojibwe received reservation lands when they resisted removal.

Fur trade and lead mining dominated the state's economy until the late 1830s when farming became central. Many of the miners and traders who came up from the southern territories and states brought slaves with them when they came to take advantage of Wisconsin's natural resources. Some would eventually be freed, but many were sent back to slavery in the South.¹⁵ Wisconsin was also home to a contingent of abolitionists who founded the Republican party and helped slaves escape to Canada on the Underground Railroad. Blacks were not allowed to vote until 1886 after black leader Ezekiel Gillespie sued for the right to vote. The years following the Civil War saw continued racial discord; Wisconsin's history is characterized by segregation, lynching, and other atrocities directed at Blacks.

Despite legislation that supported segregation and oppression, the Black population grew throughout the late 1880s, particularly in Milwaukee, which today continues to be where the majority of Blacks live. That said, the population was small, only about 3,000 people, because segregation laws substantially limited housing and employment opportunities. During the latter half of 1800s, Catholic missionaries built mission schools on the reservations, operating under federal American Indian education programs to remove children from their homes to place them in boarding schools, some of which continue to operate today under tribal control.¹⁶ Under the Dawes Act of 1887, reservation lands were allotted to individuals for farming in an effort to undermine the tribes' communal systems; within 30 years, 90% of former reservation lands were owned by Whites. The late 19th century was also a time of intense immigration from Europe, particularly Germany. Today, more than 40% of the population is of German ancestry, making Wisconsin one of the most German-American-dominated states. Numerous ethnic festivals are held throughout Wisconsin to celebrate this heritage.

The industrial boom of World War I saw a two-fold increase in the Black population because of the need for factory workers, but following the Depression, nearly half would lose their jobs, versus 13% of Whites. Segregation also dominated the education system. It was not until the 1930s that Blacks were allowed to teach, and even then, it was only in Black schools.

The rise in factories during World War II led to a 600% increase in the Black population, but they continued to live in highly segregated communities. During the 1950s and 1960s, when Blacks constituted 15% of the population, Wisconsin was regarded as one of the nation's most segregated states and schools were not desegregated as Brown required. It was not until 1979 that a desegregation plan was implemented. Housing continued to be highly segregated, especially in light of suburbanization; today, urban areas are predominantly Black.

Socioeconomics

Currently, the state's economy is based in agriculture, manufacturing, and healthcare. Wisconsin is the second largest producer of milk in the United States and is the lead producer of cheese, corn, and a variety of other produce. Many large food corporations have their headquarters in Wisconsin. Wisconsin saw a significant loss of jobs, totaling more than 84,000 in 2002, primarily in manufacturing. In recent years, health care companies have come to dominate Wisconsin's industry and constitute the top ten largest employers. Although there was significant variability, ranging from \$23,488 in Juneau to \$40,007 in Dane¹⁷, the average per capita personal income was \$34,471 in 2005.

Inequities in education do not occur in isolation; they mirror disparity in the system as a whole. Wisconsin's data underscore the continued marginalization of individuals from CLD backgrounds that characterizes most systems—illustrated by the disproportionality in income, unemployment, health insurance, and health outcomes.

Unemployment rates hit a high in 2002 at 5.5% and dropped to 4.8% by 2007. However, there is a significant difference of unemployment rate between races; the rate is over 13% for people identified as Black or Asian/Pacific Islander and is 10.8% for people identified as American Indian. The highest unemployment rates are seen for males of Asian/Pacific Islander descent (17.3%) and males identified as Black (14.8%). These rates are triple the average unemployment rate of the state and highlight continued economic disparities.¹⁸

In 2004, 9% of Wisconsin residents, or 489,000 people, lived below the federal poverty line. Single-female-parent households presented the highest rates of poverty (28.6 %) of all family types. There is also a considerable racial gap, as the percentage of people living in poverty among people identified as Black (33%) and Hispanic (29%) was more than four times the percentage among those identified as White (7%). The southern region has the highest rates because it is home to Milwaukee, a city with the fourth highest child poverty rate in the nation. One in three school-aged children lives below poverty level, making Milwaukee Public Schools sixth among the nation's largest districts with high percentages of children who are poor.¹⁹ Unemployed adults and people with less education tend to have higher poverty rates. For example, 30% of adults 25 years old and older who had not completed high school were poor, and only 1% of adults who had a college degree were poor²⁰.

¹⁴ <http://www.mpm.edu/wirp/ICW-21.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/topics/blackhistory/>

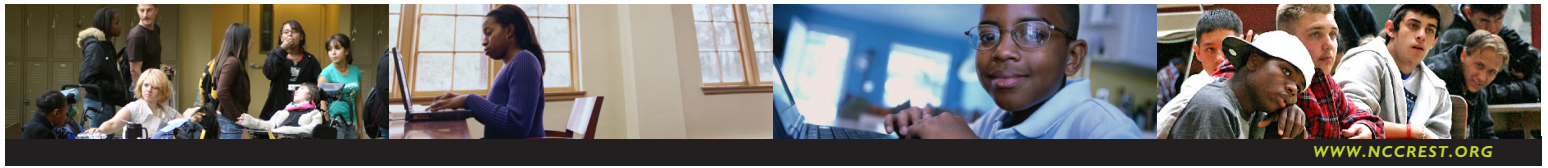
¹⁶ <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1263>

¹⁷ State of Wisconsin, http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/oea/per_capita_personal_income/pcpi_2005.pdf

¹⁸ State of Wisconsin, http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/oea/aa_xls/STATE.xls

¹⁹ Glauber, B. & Poston, B. (2008, January 9). 33% of students here live in poverty. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Retrieved from <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=705506>.

²⁰ State of Wisconsin, <http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/stats/pdf/fhs-PovertyHealthfactsheet.pdf>



Health Care

As of 2005, Wisconsin had the fourth lowest uninsured rate of all states for people under age 64. In 2005, 89% of residents had health insurance for the entire year. In spite of this low rate of uninsured individuals, people identified as Black, American Indian, Hispanic, and Asian/PI have higher uninsured rates (10 %, 7%, 13%, and 7%, respectively) than whites (4%). The number of uninsured children increased to 110,000 in 2005, which represents an increase of 21% over 2004, with the greatest increase observed among children identified as White and in the western and southeastern regions of the state. In contrast, the number of children identified as Black without insurance decreased by half from 2004 to 2005. The increasing percentage of children without insurance represents a national trend²¹.

Limited access to health care and poor health-related outcomes are both more common among the poor. In 2004, 10% of all Wisconsin residents were in fair or poor health, which includes 24% of poor people but only 8% of people with higher income. Moreover, only 8% of people living in poverty had continuous health coverage for 2005.²² In 2006, Governor Jim Doyle announced his strategy, BadgerCare Plus, to expand the state's health insurance program for children and families, which merges Medicaid, the state's BadgerCare program for uninsured families, and the Healthy Start program for pregnant women and minor children into one comprehensive program that plans to feature a more user-friendly eligibility process and outreach programming in collaboration with local non-profits in an effort to enroll all eligible children. The program went into effect in February 2008 and is available for all children as well as adults with incomes less than 2-3 times the federal poverty level.²³

Health Outcomes.

The percentage of women who receive first trimester prenatal care (85.1%) is above the national rate (84.1%) and has been steadily increasing since 1994. In addition, overall, Wisconsin has lower rates of low birth-weight (7%) than the U.S. (7.9%). However, the percentage of rates of low birth-weight of Milwaukee County (9%) has been consistently higher than the national and the state rate. The infant mortality rate for Wisconsin in 2004 was 6%, which is lower than the national rate (6.9%), but the rate for Milwaukee County is nearly 10%.

Racial and ethnic minorities in Wisconsin are more likely to have lower levels of income and education, and less likely to have less continuous health insurance coverage or receive minimal health care services. The health gaps between people identified as Black and American Indian compared with people identified as White were the most significant. People identified as Black have a higher rate of chronic disease, death, low birth weight, infant mortality, which is nearly five times the rate of people identified as White, and HIV, which is ten times the rate of Whites. Likewise, people identified as American Indian have higher rates of mortality, infant mortality, smoking

during pregnancy, death from diabetes, hospitalization for depression, and suicide than Whites in the state and compared to American Indians nationwide. In addition, people identified as Hispanic have higher rates of HIV infection.²⁴

Politics

Wisconsin possesses a political history that illustrates the state's early struggles with immigration, diversity, labor issues, and oppositional political forces. In the mid-nineteenth century, there was a significant increase in European immigration that triggered assimilation efforts, including English-only education mandated under the Bennett Law of 1888. Wisconsin's unions were unique because they were organized by industry, not skill level, and had strong ties to the Socialist Party. In the late 1800's, these unions established the eight-hour work day and fought against low wages, irregular payments, hiring of unskilled workers to manage new technology, as well as prejudice against women and people identified as Blacks and immigrants. Wisconsin's political history can be mapped on a wide spectrum, from the rise of labor unions and Bob La Follette of the Progressive movement to Joe McCarthy, the radical anti-Communist on the other. In the 1930's and early 1940's the labor movement was championed by La Follette, who would later come under attack by McCarthy, the controversial senator who rose to power until he was discredited in the mid 1950's.

The rising unemployment and economic recession of the late 70s and early 80s led to 14 years of domination by conservatives, headed by Tommy Thompson. In his state of the state address in 1997, Governor Thompson established four principles that would be at the heart of educational reform: school choices for parents, education relevant to the workplace, school accountability, and technology improvements. In a 1997 executive order, Thompson established Wisconsin's Council on Model Academic Standards, a forerunner to today's NCLB.

This history of political contrasts continues. Wisconsin was a Democratic state in four of the last six presidential elections. However, during both the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, Wisconsin was considered a "swing" state due to its residents being relatively equally split between voting for Democratic and Republican candidates. In 2007, Wisconsin had a Democratic Governor (Doyle), and the state's senate was also controlled by Democrats (18-15), but Republicans controlled the assembly (52-47).²⁵

Summary

Before we move into our examination of Wisconsin's educational system, it is important to establish the broader context in which this system exists. We emphasize that inequities in education do not occur in isolation; they mirror disparity in the system as a whole. Information on Wisconsin's context underscore the continued marginalization of individuals from CLD backgrounds that characterizes most systems—illustrated by the

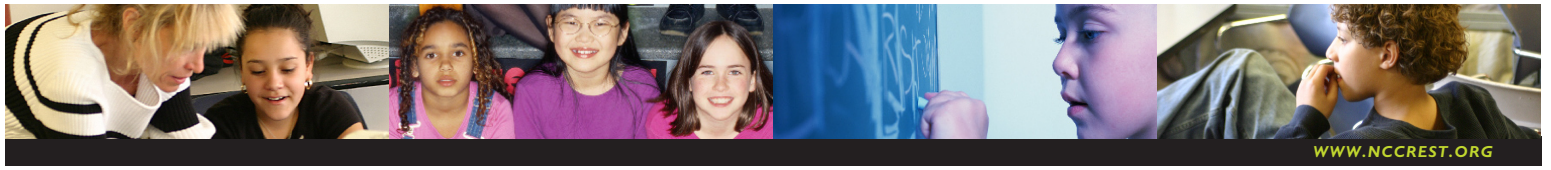
²¹ State of Wisconsin, <http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/stats/pdf/fhs05insExecSum.pdf>

²² On Wisconsin Health, retrieved from <http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/stats/pdf/OnWisconsinHealth2005.pdf>

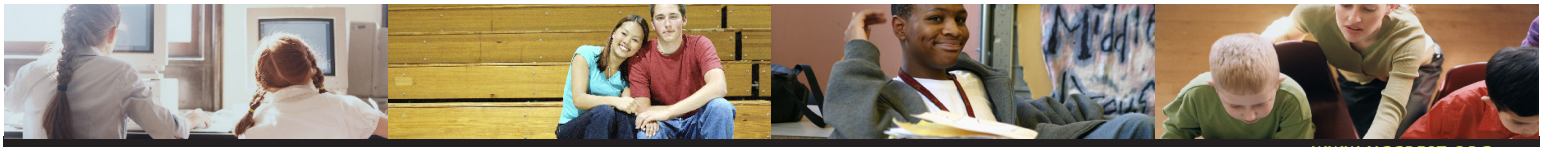
²³ <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/badgercareplus/index.htm>

²⁴ The Health of Racial and Ethnic Populations in Wisconsin: 1996-2000. Retrieved from <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/health/MinorityHealth/Report.htm>

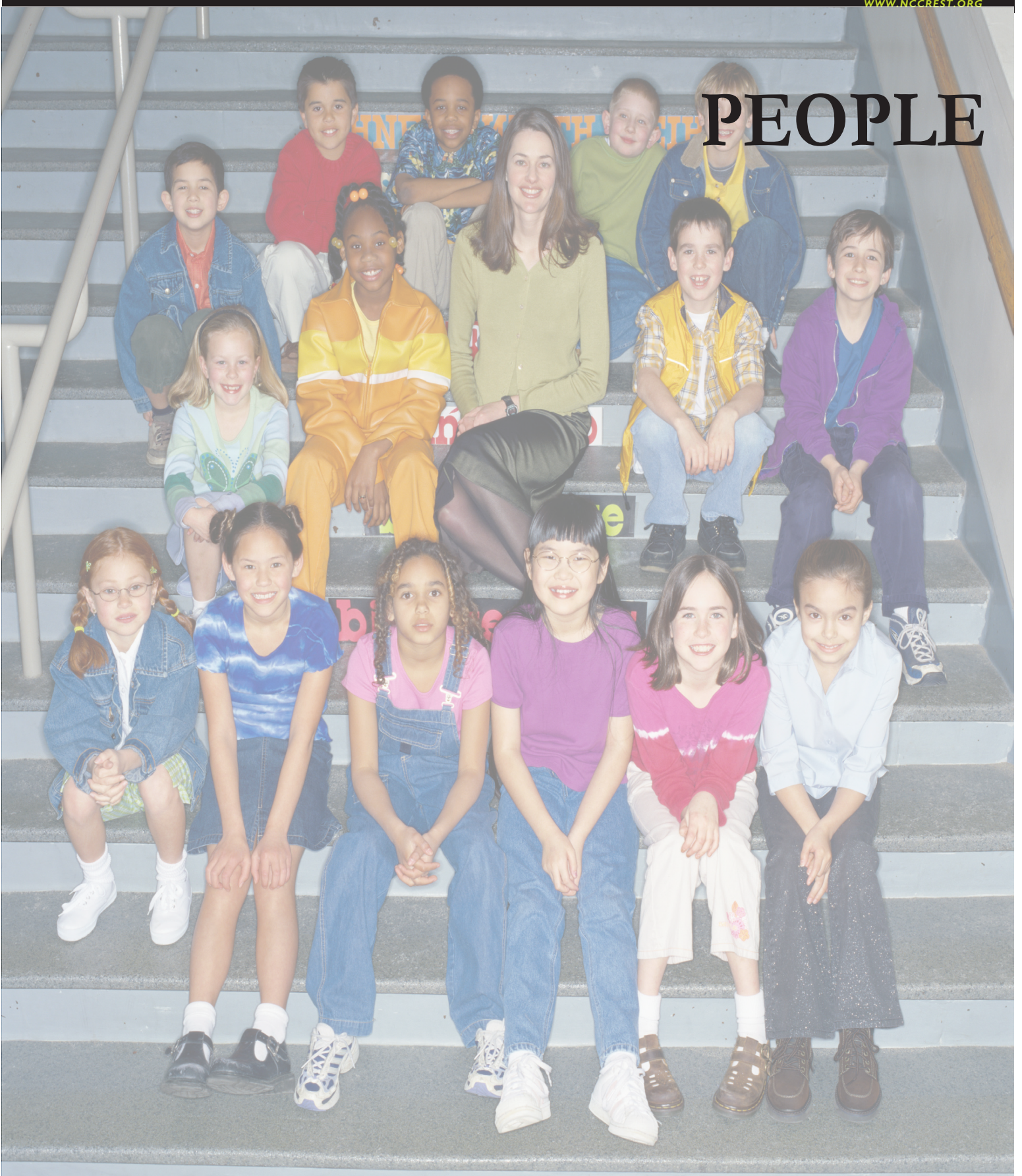
²⁵ Callender, D. (October 12, 2007). Budget showdown set for Monday. The Capital Times.



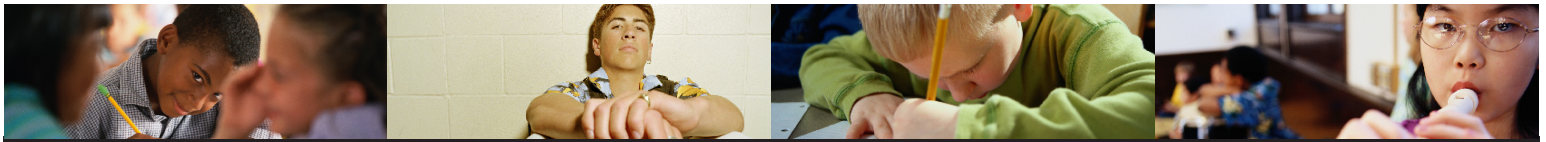
disproportionality in income, unemployment, health insurance, and health outcomes. As we examine the domains of the educational system (i.e. people, policies, and practice); this context must be recognized because it influences the educational systems.



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PEOPLE

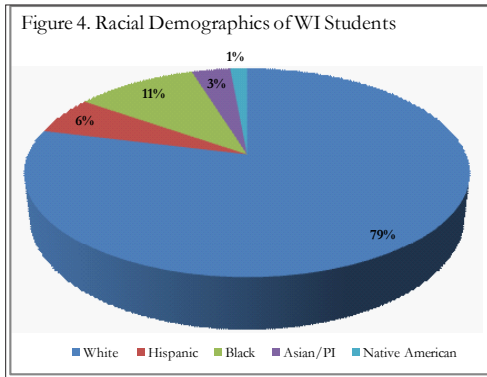


PEOPLE

Within our framework, “people” includes all those in the broad education system, including students, educators, administrators, families, and community members whose opportunities culturally responsive systems endeavor to improve. This section describes Wisconsin’s students and teachers, and explores a number of educational outcomes relevant to culturally responsive systems.

Students

There are currently more than 875,000 students in Wisconsin’s public school system. Figure 4 displays the racial composition of Wisconsin’s schools. Approximately 21% of students are from CLD backgrounds. Additionally, 5% are students identified as English language learners, most of whom speak Spanish (46%) or Hmong (26%). In the past decade, the proportions of students identified as Hispanic and ELL have more than doubled, while the Black and Asian populations have



increased only slightly. The proportion of American Indian students has remained constant. Despite the increase in students identified as CLD, there has been a downward trend in enrollment for the past ten years. It is not clear what has contributed to this decrease in overall enrollment, but it appears that much of the decline can be attributed to the declining number of students identified as White. The percentage of students from lower income homes, as indicated by eligibility for subsidized lunch, has also increased substantially in recent years, and now comprises a third of all students.²⁶

Special Education Identification and Placement Patterns

Nearly 14% of all Wisconsin students are identified as having a disability. This figure has remained fairly constant for the last seven years and is above the national average of 12%.²⁷ Identification rates for students identified as Black and American Indian have been consistently higher than their peers for the past five years. Nearly one in every five children from these groups is labeled as having a disability. Table 1 and Figures 5 through 8 display the relative risk ratios for the four racial groups in cognitive disabilities (CD), emotional/behavioral disabilities (EBD), specific learning disabilities (SLD), speech/language impairments (SLI), and all other disabilities.²⁸ The relative risk ratio provides the group’s risk of being identified in a particular category relative to White students. A relative risk ratio of 1.0 indicates that the groups are equally likely to be identified. A value less than 1.0 indicates that the target group is less likely to be identified and a value greater than 1.0 indicates that the target group is more likely to be identified than the comparison group (i.e. White students).

TABLE 1: SPECIAL EDUCATION ENROLLMENT BY PRIMARY DISABILITY; RELATIVE RISK RATIOS BY RACE/ETHNIC GROUP						
DISABILITY CATEGORY	GROUP	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
COGNITIVE DISABILITIES	Black	2.42	2.33	2.36	2.36	2.18
	Asian/PI	0.83	0.75	0.82	0.82	0.82
	Hispanic	1.08	1.08	1.09	1.09	1.09
	Native American	1.50	1.42	1.55	1.45	1.36
EMOTIONAL/ BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS	Black	1.44	1.44	1.65	1.65	1.71
	Asian/PI	0.17	0.17	0.18	0.18	0.18
	Hispanic	0.56	0.56	0.59	0.59	0.59
	Native American	2.61	2.61	3.24	3.24	3.24
LEARNING DISABILITIES	Black	1.21	1.22	1.30	1.27	1.35
	Asian/PI	0.63	0.67	0.74	0.71	0.77
	Hispanic	0.91	0.93	0.98	1.02	1.07
	Native American	1.43	1.46	1.78	1.75	1.72
SPEECH/LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENTS	Black	0.78	0.79	0.90	0.82	0.80
	Asian/PI	0.69	0.70	0.83	0.79	0.77
	Hispanic	0.94	0.97	1.07	1.03	1.09
	Native American	0.91	0.97	1.30	1.24	1.26
ALL OTHER DISABILITIES	Black	2.11	2.10	2.29	2.17	2.15
	Asian/PI	0.74	0.71	0.76	0.63	0.62
	Hispanic	0.95	0.95	0.95	1.00	1.00
	Native American	0.95	1.00	1.24	1.29	1.27

²⁶ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <http://dpi.state.wi.us/sig/dm-demographics.html>

²⁷ Donovan & Cross, 2002.

²⁸ <http://dpi.state.wi.us/sig/dm-demographics.html>

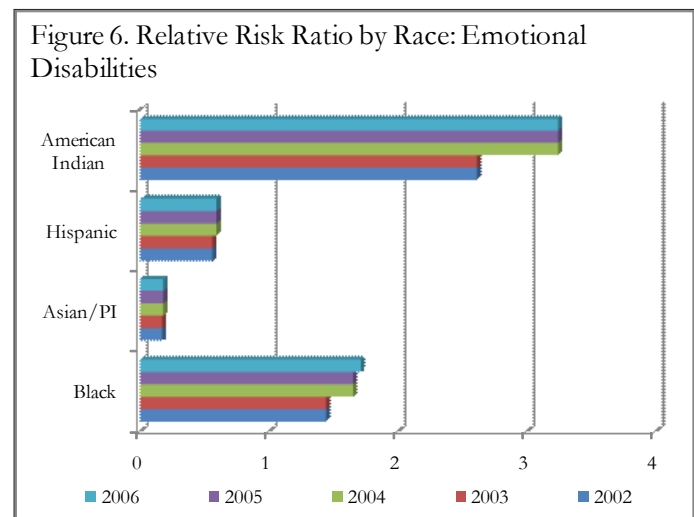
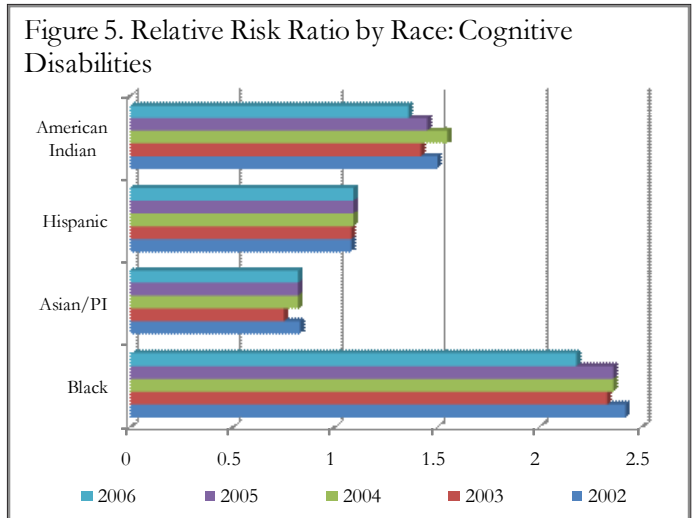


As the data show, students identified as Black and American Indian are overrepresented in CD, EBD, and SLD. For example, American Indian students are more than three times as likely to be labeled EBD and students identified as Black are more than twice as likely to be labeled cognitively disabled than their White peers. Students identified as American Indian are also overrepresented in SLI. Conversely, students identified as Asian are underrepresented across each of the major disability categories and students identified as Hispanic are underrepresented in the EBD category. These patterns are generally reflective of the levels of disproportionality seen nationally and reveal continued problems with disproportionality within the state.²⁹

When compared to national trends in identification, Wisconsin students identified as American Indian have higher relative risk in each category compared to their peers throughout the nation.³⁰ In the categories of CD and LD, they are approximately 30% more likely to be identified. In ED, they are more than 3 times more likely to be identified in Wisconsin than nationally. For students identified as Black, relative risk of CD is comparable with national data, while risk for LD and ED is somewhat elevated (10-30%). For Wisconsin students who identify as Hispanic, the relative risk in LD and ED are comparable to national data, but they are approximately 30% more likely to be identified as CD.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WDPI) reports that since 1999, there have been increases in students identified as autistic, other health impaired, and as having significant developmental delay, which the state attributed to improved early identification and service provision. There has been a decrease in the prevalence of SLD, which has been attributed to early intervening and increased collaboration among educators and parents of students identified as at-risk for academic failure.³¹ Unfortunately, this decrease in the prevalence in SLD appears primarily among White students, as the relative risk for American Indian students has increased by more than 30% and the other groups of students identified as CLD have shown increases up to 15% (see Table 1).

The state defines significant disproportionality as overrepresentation exceeding relative risk ratios of 2 and significant underrepresentation as district risk less than one-fifth of the national risk for a category. For the 2006-2007 academic year, as part of their Annual Performance Report under IDEA Part B, WDPI identified nine districts with significant overrepresentation of students identified as American Indian or Black in special education due to inappropriate identification. Twenty-seven districts were identified as having overrepresentation in one or more disability categories, and ten as having significant underrepresentation. Reviews by WDPI determined that policies, practices and procedures in all of the districts were in compliance with IDEA and were “race-neutral.”



²⁹ Five-year Executive Summary 1999-2004, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
³⁰ Donovan, M.S. & Cross, C.T. (Eds.). (2002). *Minority students in special and gifted education*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
³¹ Five-year Executive Summary 1999-2004, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

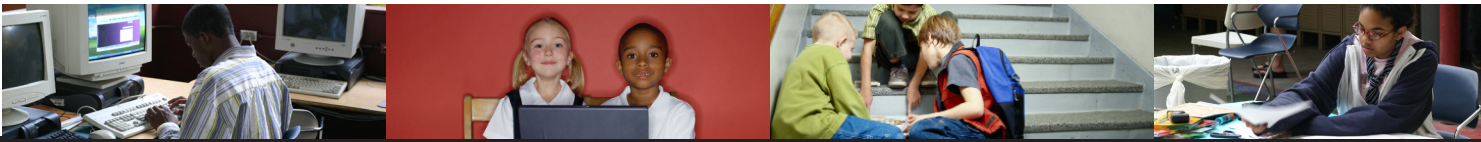


Figure 7. Relative Risk Ratio by Race: Learning Disabilities

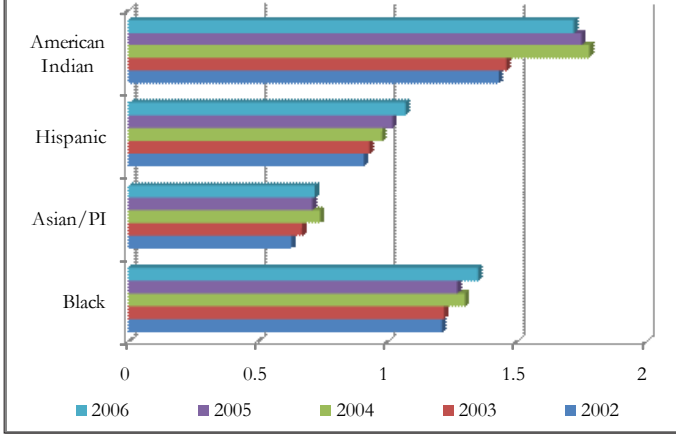


Figure 8. Relative Risk Ratio by Race: Speech-Language Impairments

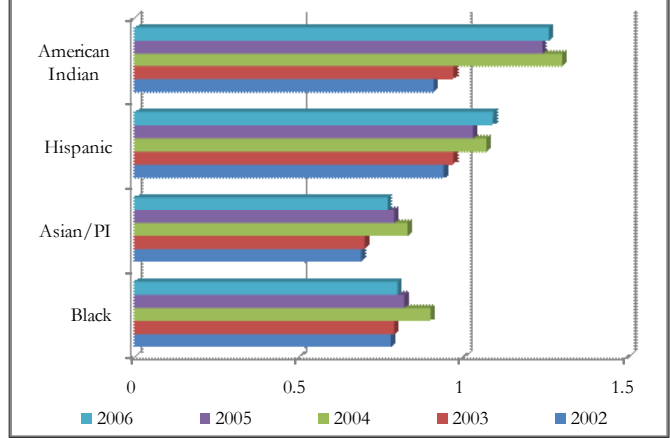


Figure 9. National maps of risk ratios for overall special education identification

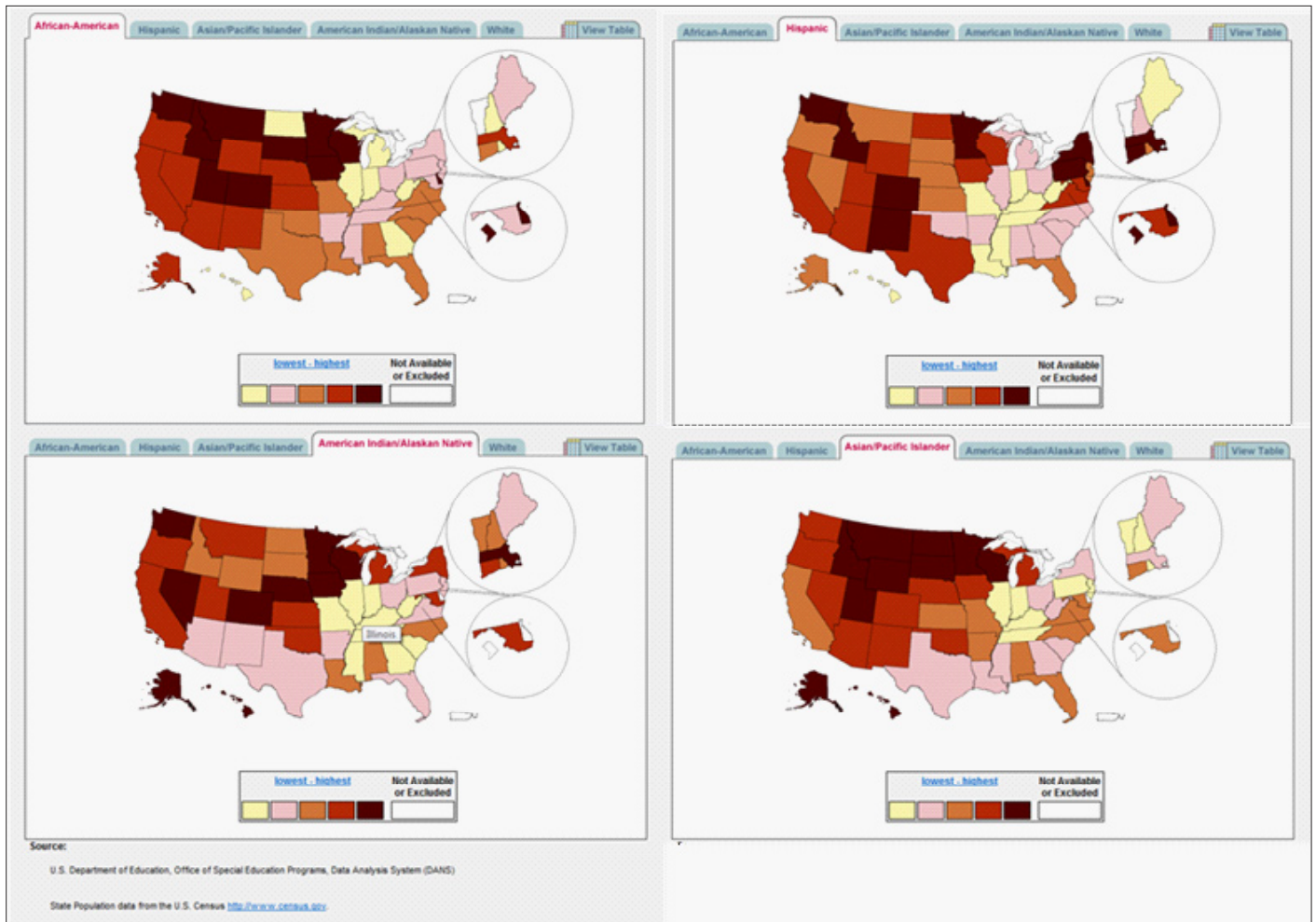


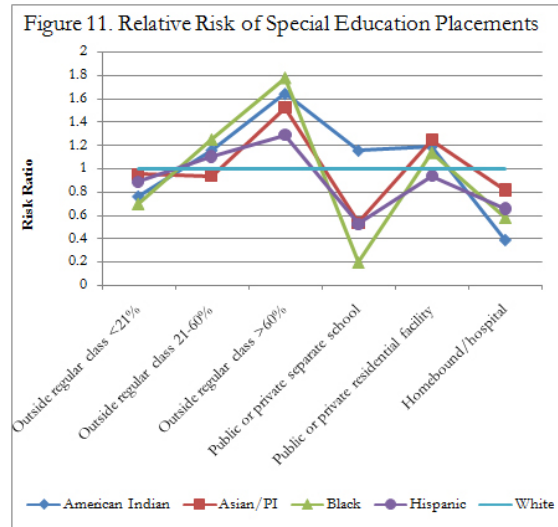
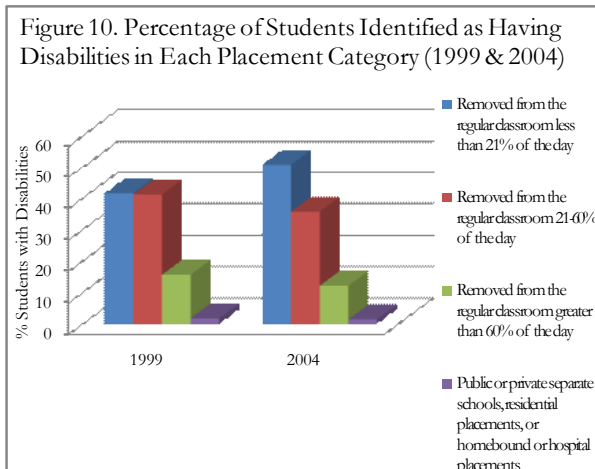


Figure 9, taken from the Data Maps at NCCREST.org, shows disproportionality in special education by race for the entire nation. For students identified as having disabilities in the race/ethnic categories of Black, American Indian, and Asian/PI, Wisconsin is among the states with the highest risk ratios. For students identified as Hispanic, Wisconsin is in the second highest category.

Since 1999, Wisconsin has steadily increased the percentage of students educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Figure 10 displays the distribution of placements for 1999 and 2004. In 1999, only 41.5% of students with disabilities spent at least 80% of their time in the regular education

school.³² Another has been harshly criticized for its restrictiveness when data revealed that 1 in every 10 students identified as having disabilities attends a separate school.³³

Despite such encouraging data on placements in the LRE, students identified as CLD are more likely than students identified as White to receive restrictive placements. The most recent data available indicate that students of all racial groups are less likely to receive special education outside of the regular education classroom less than 21% of the day, and they are more likely to be removed for more than 60% of the day (see Figure 11).³⁴



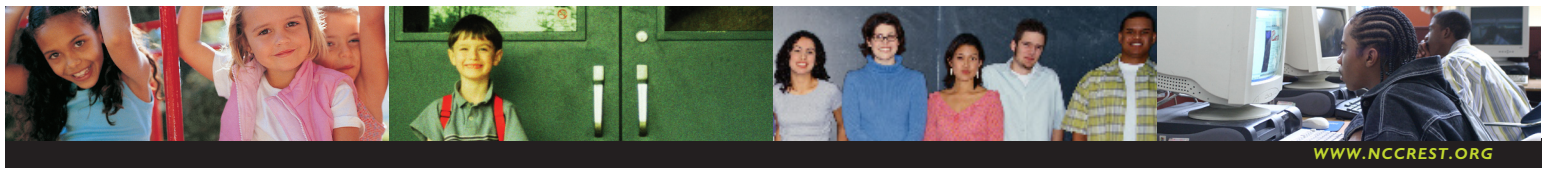
classroom; by 2004, that figure had risen to 50.83%. The proportion of students removed from the regular classroom more than 60% of the time has decreased from 15.59% to 12.09%, and the percentage of students in separate schools and related placements has fallen to 1.43%. Despite improvement at the state level, individual districts continue to experience difficulties in this area. At least one district has been found to rely on outdated service models and to be unnecessarily restrictive, with more than 40% of students identified as having disabilities placed somewhere other than their home

Educational Outcomes³⁵

Compared to national averages, Wisconsin is doing well on several indicators of student success (see Table 2). The performance of 4th and 8th graders in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is higher than the national average. Wisconsin's rankings are much lower for the proportion of children enrolled in preschool or kindergarten.

	WISCONSIN AVERAGE	RANKING	NATIONAL AVERAGE
3 AND 4-YEAR OLDS ENROLLED IN PRESCHOOL	39.3%	37	46.1%
ELIGIBLE CHILDREN ENROLLED IN KINDERGARTEN	73.4	40	75.7
4TH GRADE STUDENTS PROFICIENT ON NAEP IN READING	35.6	19	31.7
4TH GRADE STUDENTS PROFICIENT ON NAEP IN MATH	46.9	8	38.6
8TH GRADE STUDENTS PROFICIENT ON NAEP IN READING	33.2	19	29.2
8TH GRADE STUDENTS PROFICIENT ON NAEP IN MATH	37.0	13	31.0
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GRADUATING WITH A DIPLOMA	77.3	11	69.9

³² McClain, D. (2007, November 17). Special education at district given grim report. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.
³³ Hetzner, A. (2007, October 7). Special school or segregation. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.
³⁴ <http://dpi.state.wi.us/sped/pdf/cc-placement-2004.pdf>
³⁵ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <http://dpi.wi.gov/sig/dm-acadachmt.html>
³⁶ Table adapted from Education Week. (2008). Wisconsin State Highlights 2008. Bethesda, MA: Author.



All Wisconsin students take part in the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE) statewide assessment in third through seventh, ninth, and tenth grades. An analysis of data from 1999-2004 indicates growth in not only the number of students identified as having disabilities taking the WKCE, but also an increase in the percentage of students identified as having disabilities scoring at the proficient and advanced levels.

Figure 12. WKCE Performance by Group (2006AY)

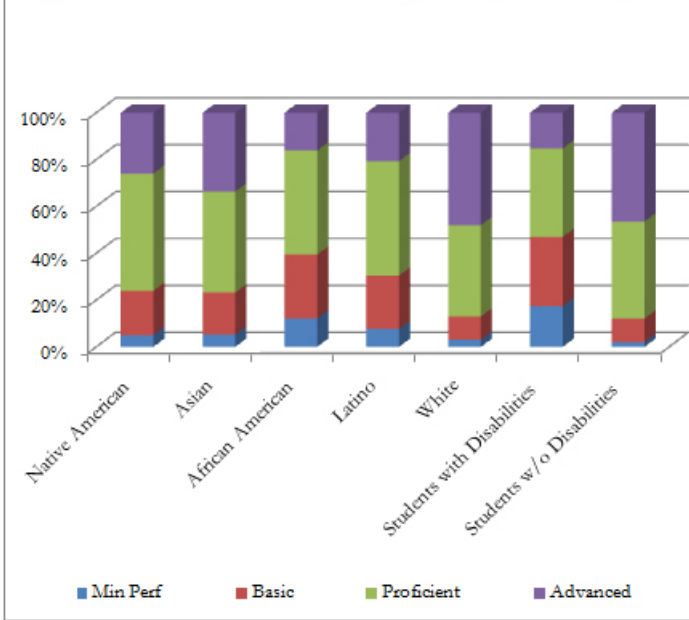


Figure 12 displays the performance of students throughout the state on the November 2006 assessment combined across all grades. Although nearly 90% of White students are performing at the proficient or advanced levels, students identified as CLD fall behind, especially students identified as Black, of whom nearly a third lack proficiency. What's more, the WKCE has received harsh criticism nationally, both for having lower standards than most other states and for failing to adequately recognize and address the achievement gaps between students identified as White and students from CLD and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.³⁷

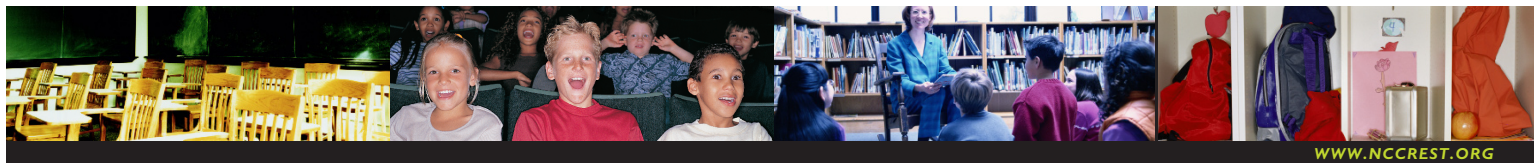
The state's retention rate has decreased over the past 10 years and is currently at approximately 2%. However, as of 2004, children from CLD backgrounds continued to be more likely to be retained, with students identified as Black and American Indian being held back at a rate 4 to 5 times that of their White peers (see Table 3). Nevertheless, for both of these groups, retention rates have decreased since 1997 when they peaked at more than 10% and 8%, respectively.

RACE/ETHNICITY	TOTAL STUDENTS	STUDENTS RETAINED	% RETAINED
WHITE	675,266	9,747	1.44%
ASIAN	28,617	712	2.49%
HISPANIC	48,670	2,345	4.82%
AMERICAN INDIAN	12,358	834	6.75%
BLACK	86,684	5,373	6.20%

As in many states, Wisconsin's students identified as having disabilities are disproportionately subjected to disciplinary consequences. As of 2003, students identified as having disabilities are more than 2.5 times as likely to be suspended as students without disabilities. Rates of expulsion for both students with and without disabilities were comparable but increasing over earlier years. The rates for students identified as American Indian and Black are disproportionately high at 4 to 5 times that of Whites. Additionally, Milwaukee Public Schools has recently received attention in the Wisconsin media for having especially high overall rates of suspensions.³⁸ In kindergarten, nearly 4% of students are suspended; by ninth grade, that number is over 50%. Data from 2005-2006 show similar patterns (see Table 4).³⁹ When disaggregated by race, there is substantial disparity among the racial groups in rate of suspensions, with students identified as Hispanic being 80% more likely to be suspended than their White peers, students identified as American Indian being more than 2.5 times more likely, and students identified as Black being 3.86 times more likely to be suspended (see Table 5). In one of the state's largest educational agencies, this data highlights the inadequacy of the behavioral support provided to all students.

GRADE	TOTAL STUDENTS	STUDENTS SUSPENDED	% SUSPENDED
PRE-K	7,376	135	1.80%
KINDER.	6,657	262	3.90%
1	6,815	532	7.80%
2	6,568	663	10.10%
3	6,227	752	12.10%
4	6,447	1,032	16.00%
5	6,357	1,195	18.80%
6	6,527	2,526	38.70%
7	6,590	3,078	46.70%
8	6,870	3,228	47.00%
9	9,072	4,924	54.30%
10	6,462	2,751	42.60%
11	5,807	2,014	34.70%
12	4,613	968	21.00%

³⁷ Borsuk, A.J. (2007, November 12). Study faults state on schools: Officials accused of too rosy a view on student performance. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Retrieved from <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=685338>
³⁸ Borsuk, A.J. (2008, January 6). Suspension rate deemed too high. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Retrieved from <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=704133>.
³⁹ <http://dpi.wi.gov/sig/dm-attendbehav.html>



**TABLE 5: MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SUSPENSIONS BY RACE, 2005-2006 AY**

RACE	TOTAL STUDENTS	STUDENTS SUSPENDED	% SUSPENDED	RISK RATIO
WHITE	15,087	1,390	9.20%	--
ASIAN	4,139	267	6.50%	0.71
HISPANIC	18,525	3,075	16.60%	1.80
AMERICAN INDIAN	774	183	23.60%	2.57
BLACK	53,863	19,145	35.50%	3.86

Wisconsin’s graduation rate has been decreasing slightly for students with and without disabilities since 2000. The 2006 graduation rate was 90% for regular education students and 81.4% for students identified as having disabilities. For both groups, graduation rates have decreased by 2.5 to 5% in recent years. It is worth mentioning that Wisconsin’s graduation rates (80.7%) are significantly higher than the national rates (67.7%). The graduation rates for students from culturally diverse backgrounds are considerably lower than the rate for students identified as White, which is currently at approximately 93% (see Table 13). For American Indians and Hispanics, the 2006 rate was approximately 75% while it was only 65% for Black students. For Black and Hispanic students, these rates represent increases of 10-15% over the past decade, but they are still substantially lower than their peers. Dropout rates for both groups have generally been decreasing and hover around 2%. However, they are considerably higher for students identified

as Black (5.76%) and American Indian (4.01%), at about four to six times the rate of White students (0.95%). In 2000, the Wisconsin Post High School Outcomes Survey (WPHOS) was developed to assess the outcomes of a representative sample of students identified as having disabilities who graduated high school in Wisconsin. Results show positive trends for the percentage of students identified as having disabilities living independently and attending post-secondary institutions while the percentage of students employed has decreased.

Approximately 7% of all Wisconsin students take part in the Advanced Placement Program Exams. This includes 7.5% of Whites and Asians, but only 3.9% of Hispanics, 2.2% of American Indians, and 1.5% of Blacks. Of these, 69.8% of White students pass, but only 57% of Hispanics, 52.7% of American Indians, and 58.9% of Blacks pass these exams. Fifty-seven per cent of students take the ACT, with a 2007 average composite of 22. The average composite was between 17 and 20 for students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

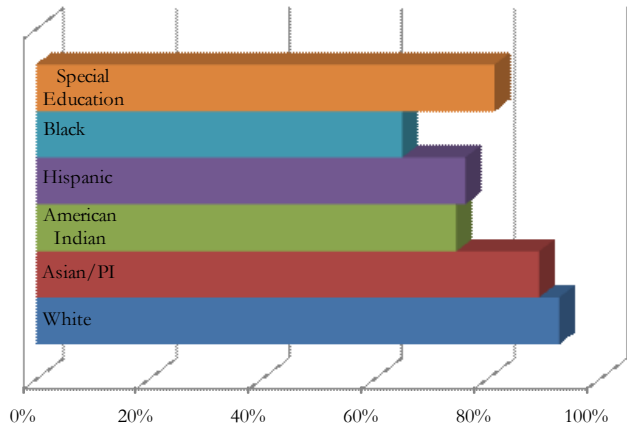
Educators⁴⁰

Despite the increasing diversity of Wisconsin’s students, approximately 96% of teachers and 92% of administrators are White. So while nearly a quarter of students come from CLD backgrounds, only about 4% of educators do. More than two-thirds are female. Almost all teachers (97.8%) are fully licensed and 98.3% are highly qualified. The percentage of teachers with master’s degrees or higher is steadily increasing and is currently at just over 48%. Most have at least five years of experience.

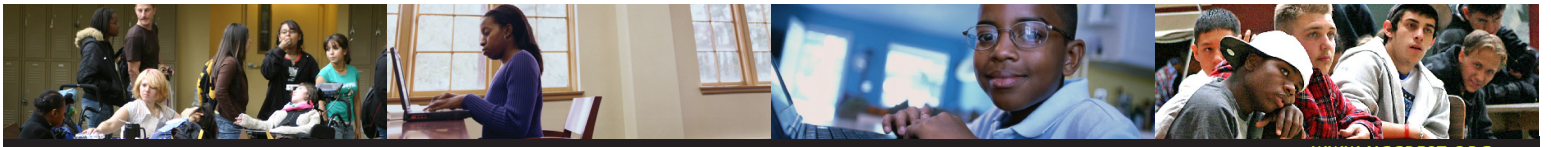
Summary

There is a consistent and troubling pattern of disparity observed across educational outcomes, including achievement, opportunities to learn, and discipline. The data appear most disconcerting for students who identify as Black, American Indian, and students identified as having disabilities. These students perform significantly below their peers on state and national assessments, are more likely to be excluded from opportunities to learn via suspension/expulsion and segregated placements, and are less likely to graduate high school. These patterns highlight the necessity to examine data disaggregated by groups. It also underscores the importance of examining educational policies and practices as they relate to opportunity to learn and educational outcomes for all students. While there has been some encouraging improvement in educational outcomes, it is also apparent that students from CLD backgrounds lag far behind their White peers on many indicators under the current system. Fortunately, as will become apparent in later sections, WDPI has undertaken intensive efforts to improve outcomes and create culturally responsive educational systems at the state, district, and building levels.

Figure 13. Percentage of Students Completing High School



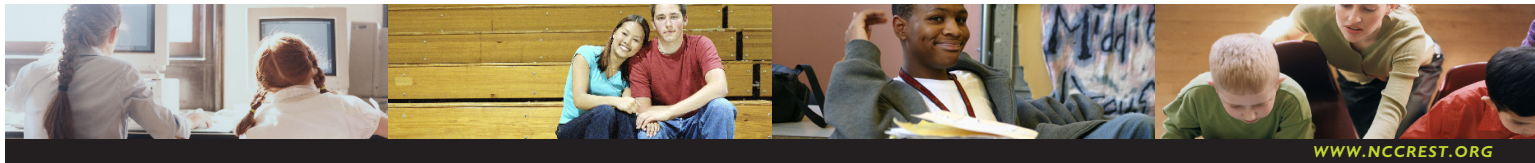
⁴⁰ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <http://dpi.state.wi.us/sig/dm-stafftchr.html>



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POLICY





POLICY

Policies include guidelines enacted at federal, state, district, and school levels that influence funding, resource allocation, accountability, curriculum, instruction, and other key aspects of schooling.⁴¹ This section explores Wisconsin's educational policies, with particular attention to policies related to culture and disability.

Governance

In Wisconsin, there is no state board of education. The school superintendent, a nonpartisan constitutional officer, is elected every four years. This governance model suggests at least three things: (1) more control of districts at the local level, (2) a greater chance that the state school officer is a representative of the people, and (3) as a decentralized form of governance, standardization of data collection may be more difficult to control and collect.

The current superintendent is Elizabeth Burmaster, who was originally elected in 2001 and reelected in 2005. Administratively, the WDPI is divided into six divisions: the Office of the State Superintendent, the Division for Academic Excellence, The Division for Finance and Management, the Division for Learning Support Equity and Advocacy, the Division for Libraries, Technology and Community Learning, and the Division for Reading and Student Achievement. All the divisions are led by an assistant state superintendent.

Wisconsin's educational system is composed of 426 public school districts, 12 public charter school districts, and 12 Cooperative Educational Services Agencies (CESAs) that were created in 1964 to provide regional services to school districts that are within their geographical boundaries.

Funding

Wisconsin's school districts are fiscally independent, meaning that they do not obtain funding from local government units such as counties or municipalities. Each district has taxing authority. School districts obtain their revenue through four major sources: state aid, property tax, federal aid, and other local non-property tax revenues such as fee and interest earnings. In the 2004-2005 school year, the majority of the districts' revenue came through property tax (37.6%) and state aid (49.7%), which includes a general school aid formula which distributes aid on the basis of relative fiscal capacity of each school district as measured by the district's per pupil value of taxable property; categorical aid that helps fund specific program costs such as special education, bilingual education, pupil transportation, and class size reduction; and school levy tax credit paid to municipalities to offset the property tax funds going to districts.⁴²

General Education

Accountability and High Stakes Testing

The Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE), administered in grades 3, 8, and 10 is used to determine AYP of students, schools, districts, and the state, and as a criteria for grade promotion.

⁴¹ Klingner et al., 2005

⁴² <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lfb/informationalpapers/27.pdf>

⁴³ Carey, K. (2006). Hot air: How states inflate educational progress under NCLB. Retrieved from www.educationsector.org

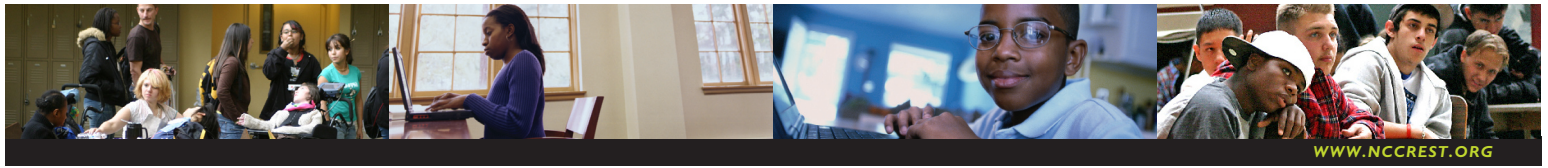
⁴⁴ Carey, K. (2007). The Pangloss index: How states game the No Child Left Behind Act. Retrieved from www.educationsector.org

Students identified as ELLs who have been in the country for less than 12 months must take the math and science portions of the WKCE and they may be required to take the reading test. Students who have attended Wisconsin schools for a full academic year must take all sections of the test. The WDPI will begin providing an alternative assessment for students identified as having disabilities called the Wisconsin Alternate Assessment for Students identified as having disabilities (WAA-SwD). This test is standards-based and is given to students with significant cognitive disabilities if the IEP team decides that the students are unable to participate in the WKCE even with accommodations.

Since 1993, AYP in Wisconsin has been based on four objectives: test participation ($\geq 95\%$ students), graduation rate ($\geq 80\%$), attendance rate ($\geq 85\%$), and proficiency in math ($\geq 47.5\%$) and reading ($\geq 67.5\%$). The proficiency index for reading and mathematics is calculated by assigning one point for each full academic year (FAY) per student who scores in the Proficient or Advanced categories on the WSAS plus one-half point for each student scoring in the Basic category. The total points are divided by the total number of FAY students tested to calculate the proficiency index.

A school not meeting AYP criteria for two consecutive years in one or more of the aforementioned objectives is identified as a School Identified for Improvement (SIFI). A District is Identified for Improvement (DIFI) when the district misses one or more AYP objectives for two consecutive years for the same objective in all the grade spans tested. When a school is identified as a SIFI, it is placed in a two year improvement plan and parents can participate in a school choice or charter school program. At the third year of missing AYP, the school receives supplemental educational services. After four years, the school is placed in corrective action, which could result in replacement of the staff, change in the curriculum, appointment of outside experts to advise the school, reorganization of the school, and extension of the school year. Finally, if the school does not meet AYP in five consecutive years, the school may be reopened as a charter school with an alternative private governance, staff may be replaced, or the school may be subject to any other major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms to staff and governance.

Despite meeting its AYP, the state has received criticism for its standards. The Educational Sector, a non-profitable and non-partisan organization, developed an index called Pangloss to identify states that report the most optimistic educational results, on which Wisconsin ranked first in 2006 and 2007.⁴³ Educational Sector reported that "Wisconsin's remarkable district success rate is mostly a function of the way it has used its flexibility under NCLB to manipulate statistical underpinnings of the AYP formula."⁴⁴ For example, Wisconsin has a minimum group size of 40 or more students per district for scores counted towards AYP. Furthermore, if the students' scores fall below the proficiency level but still fall within a range of scores called standard error, their score is counted as proficient. Districts also have a wide margin to meet AYP. If a district has a percentage proficient that is below the target but falls within a 99% confidence interval, the district is considered



to be compliant with AYP. In addition, the Fordham Institute published a report on the state of the state standards. In this report, Wisconsin's standards were rated as low compared to other states, and were regarded as particularly lacking in science and mathematics. In general, Wisconsin standards were critiqued for having impossible to teach standards, broad grade spans, and for being broad and vague.⁴⁵

Teacher Certification

WDPI requires that all applicants for teacher certification pass the Pre-Professional Skills Tests (PPST) in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics and hold a degree from an approved undergraduate or graduate professional education program. These approved professional programs incorporate a number of standards, including: teachers should be skilled in the subject area they are teaching; be knowledgeable about how children grow and learn differently, how to teach, how to communicate well, how to plan different lesson plans, how to test for students' progress, how to evaluate themselves, and how to connect with other teachers in the community.

Wisconsin defines a "highly qualified" special educator using the High Objectives Uniform State Standards of Evaluation (HOUSSE). HOUSSE requires special educators to have a bachelor's degree, a Wisconsin special education license in a specific area of assignment, and experience teaching core academic subjects to students identified as having disabilities. Special educators holding only an emergency license or a permit in their area of assignment are considered highly qualified if they are enrolled in an approved program that will be completed in three years, they receive high quality professional development before and while teaching, they receive intensive supervision and monitoring, and they have passed the Praxis II content test.

School Choice

In 1990, Wisconsin became the first state to implement a school choice voucher program which has become the largest in the nation and is a model for advocates of school choice. The program provides \$6,500 vouchers to students whose family income is near poverty level to attend private schools. In the 2006-07 academic year, \$70 million in public funds were diverted from the Milwaukee School District to pay for approximately 18,550 students to attend 122 private schools.⁴⁶ Most families participating in this program come from minority groups, especially students identified as Black and Hispanic. Academic achievement data from participating students suggest that these students had greater math score gains in state assessments than comparison groups, but no significance differences were found in reading scores.⁴⁷

Charter Schools

Charter schools are non-sectarian schools that are free from state regulations in exchange for greater accountability for results, but they are still held to

federal laws regarding general or special education and civil rights policies. Wisconsin's charter school program was established in 1993, permitting 10 school districts to establish up to two charter schools each. In 1995, this legislation was revised, giving chartering authority to school boards and eliminating the cap on charter schools. The state now has the 7th most charters in the nation with 188 charter schools serving over 28,000 students. Black students represented 36.7% of the charter school enrollment, which is more than three times their proportion of the total school population. Similarly, Hispanic students represented 14.8% of the charter school enrollment, which is more than twice the proportion of the total school population. The opposite trend was found in the enrollment of White students. White students represent only 43% of the charter school enrollment but 78.3% of all students in Wisconsin.⁴⁸ The growth in charter schools contributes to increased competitiveness for enrollment⁴⁹ and has been shown to increase academic performance in traditional public schools.⁵⁰ Milwaukee charter schools, however, have come under harsh criticism for their poor records of academic performance relative to the city's traditional public schools.⁵¹

Chapter 220

To promote racial and cultural integration, the state of Wisconsin enacted Chapter 220 in 1975, which provides state funds to assist school districts in desegregation. School transfers are based on parents' choice and school districts' decisions to improve educational outcomes. Aid is provided to minority students transferring from high-minority areas ($\geq 30\%$ of enrollment) to an area with low minority enrollment ($< 30\%$) and for White students transferring from a low-minority area to a high minority attendance area. As of 2007, the total expenditures under Chapter 220 were \$84,750,000. This transfer policy has had a particularly strong influence in Milwaukee schools.⁵²

New Wisconsin Promise

When Superintendent Burmaster took office in 2001, she announced the "New Wisconsin Promise" to ensure access to quality education for all children through a commitment to effective student services, special education, and prevention programs.⁵³ She identified closing the achievement gap as the State's "number-one priority for ensuring long-term security for [the] state and for [its] citizens." In January 2008, WDPI held a statewide Promise conference addressing district and school improvement and race, equity, and school culture.



⁴⁵ Finn, C., Julian, L., & Petrilli, M. (2006). The state of the states' standards. Retrieved from <http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/State%20of%20State%20Standards2006FINAL.pdf>

⁴⁶ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/doc/mpc07mf.doc>

⁴⁷ Rouse, C. E. (1998). Private school vouchers and student achievement: An evaluation of the Milwaukee parental choice program. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2, 553-602

⁴⁸ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, http://dpi.state.wi.us/sms/pdf/dpi2006_07_web.pdf

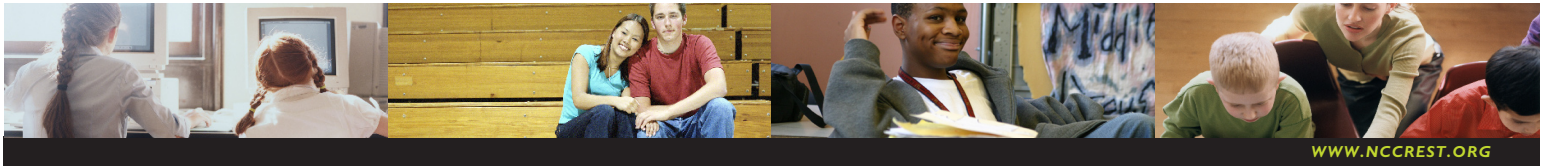
⁴⁹ Witte, J.F., Schlomer, P.A. & Shober, A.F. (2007). Going charter? A study of school district competition in Wisconsin. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 82(2-3), 410-439.

⁵⁰ Bohte, J. (2004). Examining the impact of charter schools on performance in traditional public schools. *Policy Studies Journal*, 32(4), 501-520.

⁵¹ Redovich, D.W. (2003). The hypocrisy of Milwaukee choice and charter schools. Retrieved April 7, 2008 from www.jobseducationwis.org/164%20The%20Hypocrisy%20of%20Milwaukee%20choice%20and%20charter%20schools.doc

⁵² Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lfb/Informationalpapers/28.pdf>

⁵³ Wisconsin 2007 State Performance Plan



Special Education

The state of Wisconsin passed the first comprehensive special education law in the nation in 1973, later to be aligned with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, now the Individuals with Education Act, most recently reauthorized in 2004. Act 258 of 2006 requires Wisconsin's educational statute to match the 2004 revisions of IDEA and eliminated many provisions that were not included in the federal legislation. Additionally, Act 258 added several provisions. It now requires LEAs to conduct an evaluation of a child when referred by a parent or a teacher unless one was conducted within a year. Special educators who participate in the IEP team must have experience in the particular area in which the student is having difficulties. If the child is attending a school in a non-resident school district under the full-time open enrollment program, the IEP team must include at least one person from the student's resident school district who has knowledge about the student.

Wisconsin's special education statute, Chapter 115, requires LEAs to include children with disabilities in all statewide and district assessments and report results.⁵⁴ As a result of these requirements, the WAA-SwD was implemented in January 2008 for students with severe cognitive disabilities. State policy makers are expecting to obtain meaningful information from the test to elaborate educational laws for this population.⁵⁵

Least Restrictive Environment

The 1998 amendments to Chapter 115 require that children with disabilities be educated with nondisabled peers at "the maximum extent appropriate" and that parents be participants on the IEP team to determine placement. If the team decides that the child will not participate or will participate part-time in the general education curriculum, the IEP must include an explanation of the extent of this decision. When selecting the LRE, the team must consider any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of the services. The amendment also states that if there is evidence of any inconsistency when placing students in the LRE, the state will review the LEA's justification for its actions and will assist in implementing any corrective actions needed. The WDPI provides training to LEAs to distinguish between the removal from the regular classroom and the amount of special education children receive according to their IEP.

Disproportionality

As per 1997 amendments to IDEA, Wisconsin collects annual district-level data for students age 6 to 21 enrolled in special education services, disaggregated by race/ethnicity to determine the occurrence of disproportionality using methodology developed in collaboration with Daniel Losen of the Harvard Civil Rights Project and NCCRESt. In order to determine the presence of disproportionality in a district, the group's size must exceed 10 members in a given disability category and 100 members in the total student enrollment. Additionally, the calculated risk ratio must exceed the state-level risk ratio for White students and must be greater than 2.0. After identifying districts

where disproportionality occurs, the WDPI calculates the percentage of districts with disproportionate representation as a result of inappropriate identification as determined by an internal review of policies, procedures, and practices. This percentage is used to create baselines and measurable goals to track disproportionate representation of minority students identified as having disabilities. The percentage of districts with disproportionate representation was 2.27% in 2005 and 0% in 2006.⁵⁶

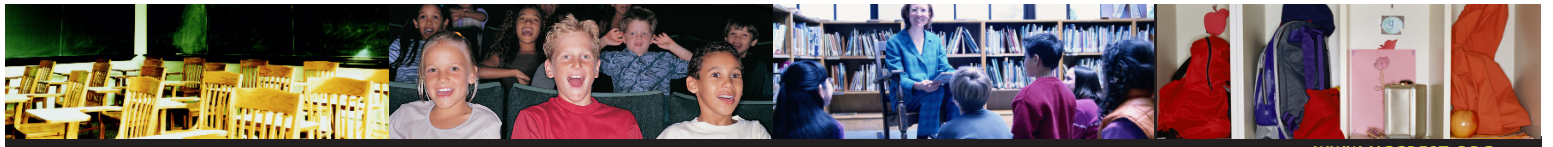
Summary

Wisconsin's school governance is based on a model unique to most state educational agencies, as there is no state board of education and the superintendent is a nonpartisan constitutional officer. There are over 420 school districts, each of which is independent from local government units. Wisconsin was the first state to implement a school choice voucher program and has a large number of charter schools; both of these options have been heavily utilized by students who are CLD. The current superintendent, Elizabeth Burmaster, has established the New Wisconsin Promise, which seeks to ensure access to quality education for all students and to reduce the achievement gap. The next section will examine the particular practices in place to improve outcomes for all students, especially those from CLD backgrounds.

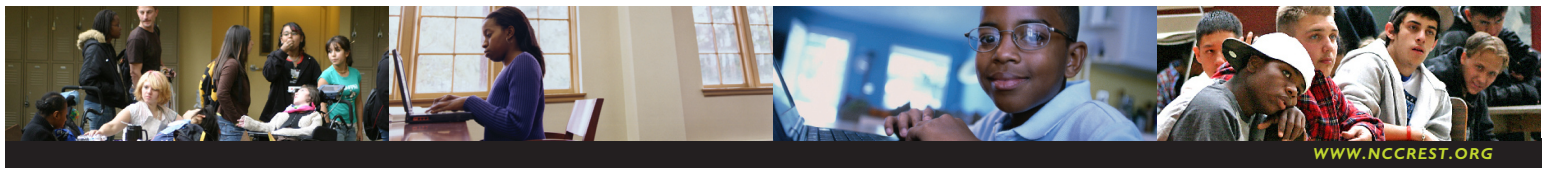
⁵⁴ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/hmlaws.html>

⁵⁵ Hetzner, A. (2007, September, 30). Test may alter disabled schooling. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Retrieved from www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=669226

⁵⁶ 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 Wisconsin State Performance Plans



PRACTICES



PRACTICES

Within this report, “practice” is used to refer to the procedures, models and strategies utilized by educators to foster positive educational outcomes. Here, we explore state level general and special education practices.

General Education⁵⁷

In recent years, the WDPI has taken several steps to promote education for all. To achieve the New Wisconsin Promise goal of improving educational outcomes for all students, the state-funded Early and Ongoing Collaboration and Assistance (EOCA) project was created in 2001 to provide leadership and technical assistance to LEAs to increase the use, variety, and quality of general education options, professional development, and parent involvement. EOCA provided a research-based framework for coordinating early intervening service. Between 2001 and 2004, participating schools were shown to have improved student achievement for children with and without disabilities, higher rates of parent participation, reduced suspension rates for Blacks, but also had higher special education referral and placement rates.

The Reading Excellence and Demonstration of Success Initiative (READS) provided grants to LEAs to promote the use of comprehensive, evidence-based universal, secondary, and individualized literacy instruction strategies available to students. Funds were used to support professional development and progress monitoring. An external review by Learning Point Associates for READS from 1999 to 2003 indicated that in schools participating in the initiative, teacher capacity as literacy educators increased, students’ phonics, reading comprehension, and writing scores improved, special education referral rates decreased, and the achievement gap in reading was reduced or eliminated for all ethnic minority groups.



In April 2006, EOCA and READS were combined and enhanced under a new, more comprehensive systems-change initiative, Responsive Education for All Children (REACH), which focused on data-based decision-making and evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies. REACH is funded by an IDEA Discretionary Grant, Title I, and a State Improvement Grant to the WDPI and includes several features:

- The REACH Technical Assistance Center which develops tools and provides expert mentoring to support its conceptual framework.
- Four REACH Regional Centers that provide training and technical assistance.
- Competitive district grants to high-needs schools. 93 LEAs, including over 270 schools, were awarded REACH grants in the first year of the initiative. Twelve of the districts have previously been identified as having disproportionality.
- A REACH advisory leadership team that provides expertise, advice and feedback about project goals, needs, and priorities to the project administrators.
- An online resource clearinghouse.

⁵⁷ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <http://dpi.wi.gov/div-teams.html>

- Community partnerships with the WDPI Community Learning and Partnerships, the WI Parent Teacher Association, and the Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training, and Support.

The framework of REACH provides a foundation for the use of IDEA Early Intervening Services funds and for implementation of Response to Intervention. REACH outlines a number of expected outcomes, including:

- Improved student achievement and reduced achievement gaps,
- Reduced behavior concerns/disciplinary actions,
- Increased rate of appropriate eligibility decisions,
- Increased regional and local capacity to address issues of disproportionality,
- Increased graduation rates of students identified as having disabilities,
- Increased capacity of all educators to address the needs of students at risk for failure, and
- Increased number of families meaningfully participating in the problem-solving process of all educators to address the needs of students at risk for failure.

The WDPI Special Education Team also provides an extensive list of resources on culturally responsive pedagogy and specific resources for working with a variety of diverse populations, including students who are identified as Black, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, English language learner, immigrants, and refugees.

Special Education

WDPI developed the Continuous Improvement and Focused Monitoring System (CIFMS) to ensure procedural compliance with state and federal regulations and stakeholder involvement in collaboration with the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring (NCSEAM). Stakeholders included special education teachers and administrators, parents, advocates, and state board of education representatives.

Under the IDEA State Performance Plan requirements, all Wisconsin LEAs will be monitored through the 2010-2011 academic year. Each academic year, one-fifth of the state’s 440 districts, charters, and private schools will be subject to monitoring via self-assessments that are reported to WDPI. Regional and webcast trainings are available to help LEAs prepare.

One important resource WDPI has developed for parents is the Wisconsin Statewide Parent-Educator Initiative (WSPEI) focused on fostering parent-school partnerships for children with disabilities. WSPEI provides parents with information on state and national resources available for parents of children with disabilities and helps connect parents to their district and CESA parent liaisons. The initiative also develops workshops to train parents on the state education system and special education issues. In order to make the workshops more accessible, attendance is free and stipends are available to pay for childcare and travel expenses. Through the Parents in Partnership program the development of leadership and advocacy skills is emphasized as parents develop support groups, meet with WDPI staff, and learn about



the special education process, parent rights, collaborative teaming, conflict management, policymaking, and inclusion.

Least Restrictive Environment

In 1999, WDPI collaborated with researchers from the Universities of Wisconsin and Illinois to conduct a study of the experiences of students identified as having disabilities in the general education classroom. The study was funded by an IDEA Discretionary Grant and utilized observational data, staff surveys, social network data, and academic achievement data. Although the authors emphasize that this was not publishable research, the study revealed a number of interesting findings:



- New teachers and special education teachers were more willing to make accommodations and modification for students identified as having disabilities.
- Teachers who had students identified as having disabilities in their classrooms were more confident in making modification than teachers who did not have such students.
- Teachers found addressing the behavioral needs of students more challenging than addressing their learning needs.
- Students identified as having disabilities received instruction in small groups or one-on-one in special education classrooms more often than in the regular education classroom. They also had more opportunities to respond and increased rates of correct response in the special education classroom.
- Students identified as having disabilities spend less time engaged and on-task.

WDPI created a Data Verification Workgroup that collaborated with NCSEAM to monitor the accuracy of educational data. The workgroup developed online training materials to assist districts in reporting special education environment codes and modified the CIFMS manual to facilitate data management.

Wisconsin has faced some challenges providing special education services. In the fall of 2007 Milwaukee Public Schools was sanctioned by a federal judge for systematically failing to provide special education services to children who needed them between 2000 and 2005. In addition, the judge ruled that the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction failed to oversee the district's practices. The judge also expressed that the district had suspended students rather than figuring out if they needed special education services.

Disproportionality

In 2004, the Discretionary Disproportionality Project was established with a FY 2004 budget of \$200,000 in order to achieve the following goals:

- to review research on the factors affecting referral and placement decisions,

- to develop partnerships with local LEAs that developed resources to address disproportionality,
- to develop partnerships with CESA and RSN staff to develop training workshops for analyzing and interpreting disproportionality data,
- to promote research-based strategies to reduce referrals and increase outcomes of students identified as from CLD backgrounds, and
- to support staff attendance at conferences and trainings on disproportionality.

Also in 2004, following discussion of the problem of disproportionality, the Disproportionality Workgroup presented a review of monitoring processes and policy to the CIFMS stakeholder group.⁵⁸ This workgroup has collaborated with NCCRESt, the North Central Regional Resource Center, and Daniel Losen of the Civil Rights Project to create tools and products that address disproportionality. The workgroup also participated in the NCCRESt National Forum. A primary activity goal of the workgroup was to identify and promote research-based strategies to reduce referrals and improve outcomes for minority students.

Districts identified as having significant disproportionality are required to form teams of general and special educators to attend the WDPI Summer Institute on Addressing Disproportionality. During the Institute, teams review policies, procedures, and practices used in identification and placement of students identified as having disabilities to ensure they are nondiscriminatory. Each district is also assigned a district liaison who determines whether the observed disproportionality was a result of inappropriate identification using a research-based checklist developed by Dr. Losen. Identified districts also receive targeted technical assistance and monitoring.

Wisconsin's 2005-2006 work plan for addressing disproportionality focused on two overarching goals of improving the quality of education for all students and increasing the internal capacity to address statewide concerns relative to disproportionality. Specific actions taken included: defining significant disproportionality, identifying districts based on definition, drafting and sending a letter to districts identified with an opportunity for district response.

WDPI also developed eligibility criteria checklists in six disability areas (cognitive disabilities, visual impairments, hearing impairments, speech/language impairments specific learning disabilities and emotional behavioral disabilities) to help IEP teams make appropriate eligibility determinations. In 2005, WDPI began providing mini-grants to LEAs and CESA to address local and regional disproportionality by offering products, such as a disproportionality tool kit and exclusionary factors checklist, which can be replicated in other districts.

Wisconsin's 2005-2006 work plan for addressing disproportionality focused on the two overarching goals of improving the quality of education for all students and increasing the internal capacity to address statewide concerns relative to disproportionality. Specific actions taken included: defining

⁵⁸ Wisconsin 2007 State Performance Plan



significant disproportionality, identifying districts based on definition, and drafting and sending a letter to districts identified with an opportunity for district response. A two-day data retreat was held with the identified districts, non-identified districts and Central Education Service Areas (CESA) centers.

For the 2006 academic year, Wisconsin distributed a request for proposals to districts to work on disproportionality and culturally responsive educational systems offering a \$5,000 stipend to selected LEAs. Nine districts were selected and invited to a two day summer institute workshop in August with sessions focused on various aspects of disproportionality, culturally responsive educational practices and school improvement. The participating districts included: Madison, Milwaukee, Green Bay, Appleton, Kenosha, Racine, Janesville, Beloit, and a northern county district. Funded activities included professional development workshops on the social and systemic issues related to disproportionality, implementation of proactive disciplinary approaches, development of an RTI monitoring system for transfer students, targeted reading interventions, refinement of exclusionary checklists for special education eligibility, efforts to identify culturally responsive practices for American Indian students, professional development on district referral and placement procedures, and reviews of policies, procedures, and data. In addition, the statewide CESA Consortium used the grant to position themselves as the lead agency to provide professional development. For 2007, the program was changed to Disproportionality Demonstration Grants ranging from \$25,000 to \$50,000 for districts identified with significant disproportionality to implement systems-wide projects to reduce disproportionality and create tools or guides for use in other districts. Four districts were funded for programs that included professional development, progress monitoring, a literacy program, and a project to develop tools and a clearinghouse of information specific to the disproportionality of students identified as American Indian.

The State is now requiring a number of districts found to have disproportionate representation to reserve 15% of funds under IDEA to provide comprehensive coordinated early intervening services (EIS), in addition to developing improvement plans to increase educators' cultural competency and classroom management skills in order to improve outcomes for all students, particularly those who are CLD. For many districts, plans to address disproportionality are included in their general improvement plans, and are addressed through initiatives in general education. What's more, the IDEA requirements regarding early intervening have given the State leverage in requiring coordinated plans. WDPI emphasizes early intervening services for struggling learners in grades K-3. EIS funds can be used for professional development in scientifically-based academic and behavioral interventions, supplementary instructional materials, and educational and behavioral evaluations, services, or supports.

NCCRESt State Partner Activities⁵⁹

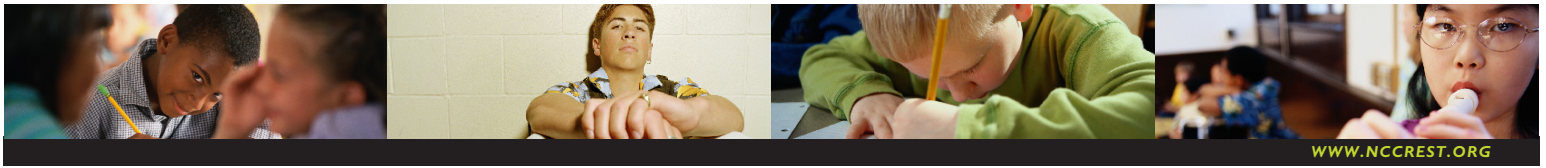
In 2005, Wisconsin was selected as one of nine NCCRESt State Partners. These states received in-depth monthly coaching and mentoring along with national meetings, site visits, problem solving sessions, leadership academies, a variety of tools and materials developed through the Center and targeted assistance with state identified issues related to disproportionality and culturally responsive systems. That year, WDPI staff received professional development from the Center's staff related to a number of topics including professional learning portfolios, IDEA policy changes, and creating work plans. WDPI staff also participated in the annual NCCRESt State Liaison meeting where systems change, culturally responsive practice, and work plans were addressed.

During the 2005 Summer Institute, Addressing Disproportionality, NCCRESt Principal Investigators and staff presented on culturally responsive systems and the referral and evaluation process to more than 170 attendees from 12 CESAs, 9 districts, the WDPI, the disproportionality task force, and community partners. The Institute's objectives were to help districts develop proposals and activities for the work of the mini-grants. NCCRESt assisted Donna Hart-Tervalon, Assistant Director of Special Education, in planning the Institute. Questions of generational poverty surfaced among participants as a concern in being able to effectively address school improvement. Dr. Losen, a consultant for Wisconsin and institute presenter, addressed these concerns in his session on the limits to the poverty explanation. He also presented a new approach to focusing disproportionality work, namely, to identify the gap between and among risk ratios of different racial groups. At the summer institute, the Madison School District reported on their plan to lower inappropriate referrals. Their plan is to reassess previously identified students identified as having disabilities as they make their way through the grades through a centralized system of assessment in order to catch inappropriate and automatic student referrals. NCCRESt staff returned to participate in the 2006 and 2007 Summer Institutes, presenting on cultural responsiveness and RTI for students identified as CLD. In addition, Dr. Hart-Tervalon participated in all NCCRESt state TA meetings, attending at least one three day workshop on leading change in culturally responsive practices.

In summary, Wisconsin's practices reflect the spirit of Superintendent Burmaster's Promise. REACH focuses on data-based decision-making and evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies and provides a framework for early intervening services. A number of activities have focused on reducing disproportionality in special education, including the Disproportionality Workgroup, the Disproportionality Discretionary Project, and the annual Summer Institutes.

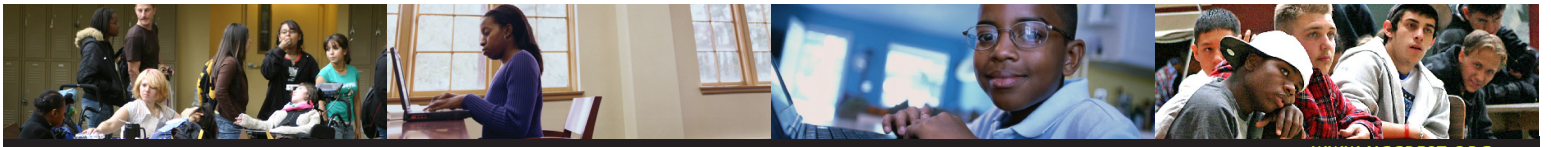
In January 2006, the Disproportionality Workgroup released its position statement supporting districts' use of Ruby Payne's Framework for Understanding Poverty as a method for examining issues of race, culture,

⁵⁹ NCCRESt Technical Reports, <http://www.nccrest.org/publications/reports.html>



and ethnicity in education and to understand disproportionality in Wisconsin. Payne's framework has been criticized for its deficit perspective, lack of empirical support, and reliance on racial stereotypes.⁶⁰ Meaningful systemic change that produces outcomes that benefit individuals who have been marginalized occurs when the work is grounded in a theoretical, evidence-based framework that helps practitioners, researchers, and policy makers to understand and reframe their work.⁶¹ Creating culturally responsive systems requires challenging deficit thinking and moving beyond it to consider how the context of schools contributes to students' struggles in our schools.

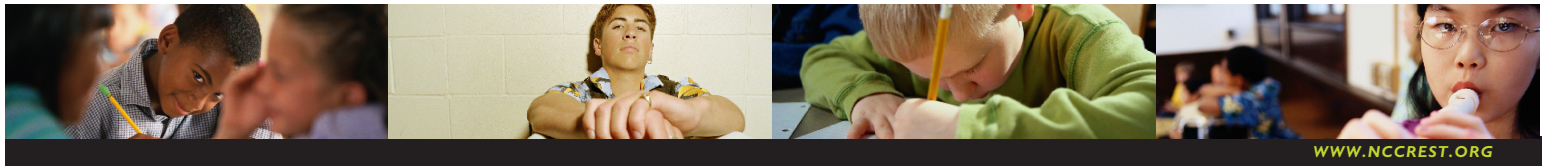
⁶⁰ Rethinking Schools Online, http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/21_02/fram212.shtml
⁶¹ Klingner, et al, 2005



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SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS





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Understanding disproportionality requires examining the intersections of culture, learning, disability, and the socio-historical context of education. Disproportionality is not only an issue of the special education system, but of the educational system at large. NCCRESt believes that improving instruction and supports within general education can reduce the number of students identified as CLD who are identified as having disabilities. This moves systems thinking beyond simply conceptualizing the student as the unit of analysis and focuses instead on the development of an educational system that is responsive to cultural diversity and provides all children with high quality opportunities to learn.

Culturally responsive education systems are grounded in the belief that students identified as CLD can excel in academic endeavors if their culture, language, heritage, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate their learning and development and if they are provided with access to high quality teachers, programs, curricula, and resources. Creating culturally responsive educational systems requires asking the difficult questions about who is advantaged and disadvantaged under the existing system and creating a space for educator reflection, inquiry, and support. Educators must evaluate their assumptions, practices, and relationships within school systems and the community in working towards systemic reform.⁶²

Wisconsin's educational system reflects national educational reform based on standards and accountability. In this national context, Wisconsin has used its resources to develop and assess outcome measures, and at the same time to provide quality instruction. Furthermore, like most educational systems throughout the nation, Wisconsin's schools are becoming increasingly diverse. Unfortunately, also like many other school systems, there is continued disproportionality in special education identification and placement and increasing disparity in educational outcomes. The racial inequities with the educational system are part of the broader social and political landscape of Wisconsin which demonstrates continued disparities in health care, labor, and economics. We notice that while educational outcomes appear to be increasing, this success seems to be limited to White students. Academic indicators of groups of students from CLD backgrounds, especially students identified as American Indian and Black, continue to fall far behind, and in some cases are even decreasing. As Wisconsin's proportion of students identified as CLD continues to grow, such data present a mounting concern. We also noticed that there is an increasing trend in the enrollment of students identified as CLD in charter schools and school choice programs. Some questions to consider as states engage these issues include the following:

- Is moving students identified as CLD out of the public school system the most effective way to deal with disparities?
- How are schools, in both the public and private sector, prepared to deal with this increasing diversity?
- Will transferring public funding from already underfunded schools to private hands bring about equal educational opportunities?
- How do the state and school districts learn about the changing needs of the students and families they serve?

⁶² Klingner et al., 2005

⁶³ Wisconsin's NCCRESt Grant Proposal

With so much emphasis on the Promise and REACH, we wonder how the discourse on improving education for all is addressing issues of culture and equity in education. One of the stated goals of the Promise was to build local expertise in disproportionality and research-based, culturally responsive practice.⁶³ Questions for policy-makers to consider as they engage these systems include the following:

- To what extent is the system designed to critically evaluate educational practices?
- How is "evidence-based practice" defined?
- How does the state address the gap between policy and practice? For instance, how is professional learning promoting cultural responsiveness through evidence-based instruction, curriculum, and intervention?

For three years now, WDPI has engaged in a number of activities designed to address the problem of disproportionality in Wisconsin's public schools, including the creation of the Discretionary Disproportionality Project, the formation of the Disproportionality Workgroup, the annual Summer Institute, and the state's ongoing affiliation with NCCRESt. Unfortunately, few districts have access to the funding and training tied to these efforts, and other promising projects such as EOCA, READS, and now REACH, since only a fraction of districts are awarded with funding to participate in many of the processes. Certainly, districts can take advantage of many of the resources of REACH and some of the other projects without state funding, but built into these projects is the assumption that the most needed change occurs through funded activities. Educators must consider how such efforts can be restructured so that they can truly benefit all students.

Culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the belief that students identified as CLD can excel in academic endeavors if their culture, language, heritage, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate their learning and development and if they are provided with access to high quality teachers, programs, curricula, and resources.

Another issue of note is the tensions in the Workgroup's conceptualization of culture in education. The Workgroup should consider the following questions as they continue their work:

- To what extent are evidence-based practices coming from a convergent theoretical perspective?
- How is such a perspective being evaluated for its compatibility with the department's goal of promoting research-based, culturally responsive practice throughout the state when these efforts are being formulated?

Clarifying these issues is likely to lead to less distortion in professional learning and practices.

Wisconsin's efforts to improve the quality of education for all students are commendable. Nevertheless, there is much work to be done in order to address the gaps in educational outcomes and provide high quality educational opportunities to all children. We wonder how universal high-quality instruction and curriculum and evidence-based early intervening are being provided. The recent systems-change initiative, Responsive Education



Creating culturally responsive systems requires challenging such deficit thinking and moving beyond it ...

for All Children (REACH), has the potential to do so, as it includes technical assistance centers to develop tools and provide training in data-based decision making and evidence-based prevention and intervention.

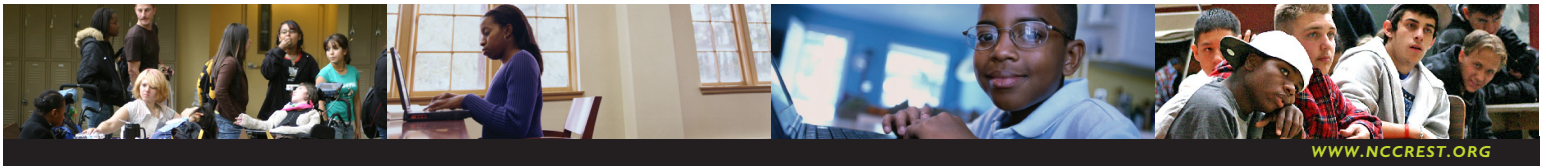
While there have been several professional learning opportunities around cultural responsiveness, it is unclear how this knowledge will permeate district, school, and classroom practice since there is no policy mandate to do so. Professional learning is insufficient for systemic change in policies, processes, and practice. The state's most recent efforts to address disproportionality and culturally responsive education, the Summer Institutes and Discretionary Disproportionality Project, have included less than 10% of districts. Presently, district improvement plans for improving disproportionality are not integrated into general improvement plans. Work to address the treatment of students identified as CLD who are identified as having disabilities is outside the realm of general practice. Moreover, the assumption that redressing disproportionality through narrowly targeting efforts to teach personnel new ways of operating ignores the influence of systemic inequality in shaping the disproportionality problem and is unlikely to effect systemic change because the personnel will continue to operate within a biased system.

We recommend some specific areas of improvement in moving towards the development of culturally responsive educational systems:

1. All improvement plans LEAs submit to the state should be inclusive of their disproportionality work. Disproportionality is an issue of the educational system as a whole and must be addressed as such. Relegating it to the realm of special education ignores the various facets of the issue and hinders systems change efforts.
2. There must be coordinated systems of professional learning that include content around disproportionality, in addition to literacy, behavior support, and evidence-based practice, etc.
3. There must be a thoughtful discourse around the skills, outcomes and capacities of the state's personnel licensure programs in ensuring that teachers are equipped to produce results for students identified as CLD.
4. The state must have a long-term plan for addressing disproportionality. Will relative risk ratios of 2 always be regarded as an acceptable level of discrepancy, or will there be an expectation of parity? If so, how will this goal be supported by the state?
5. The state must examine inequity and marginalization in other systems (e.g. economy, health care, etc.) as they relate and contribute to disproportionality in special education. Comprehensive systemic change requires the coordination of multiple systems. Because educational inequity occurs within a broader context, it is unlikely that real parity can ever be achieved if the disparity in related systems persists and goes unaddressed. This requires coordinated efforts between the educational, economic, health care, and other systems.

Promoting equitable systems is a monumental task that Wisconsin has

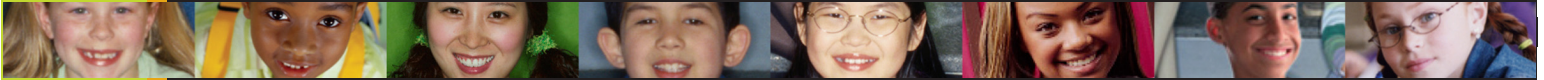
begun working towards. Raising awareness and asking the tough questions, providing high-quality instruction and evidence-based early intervening services to all students, and employing culturally responsive practices are critical. Policy must be translated to practice in ways that lead to systemic changes at all levels of the educational system – state, regional, district, school, and classroom. We are optimistic that with persistent, coordinated efforts, systemic change that supports the learning of all students can be fostered.



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