A STATE PROFILE OF EFFORTS TO CREATE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

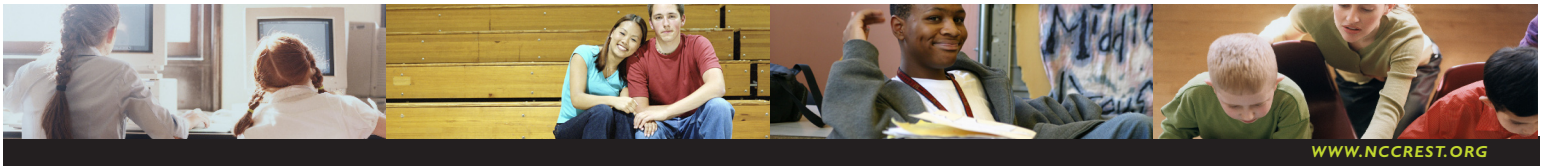## TENNESSEE

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.
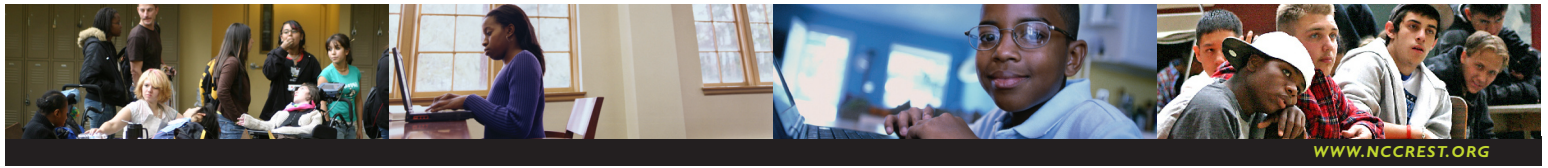
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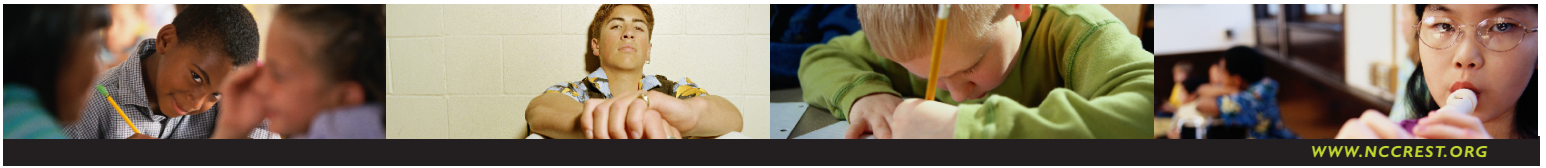
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TENNESSEE

MAY 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose. This report provides a snapshot of Tennessee's efforts to address the disproportionate representation of students identified as 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, and emphasizes how these relationships impact opportunities to learn, equity, and educational outcomes for students who are CLD, as well as how they affect practitioners employed within systems.

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 identified as CLD in special education, inequitable opportunities to learn, and disparity in educational outcomes are manifestations of the inequity of the system as a whole and are related to disparities in other systems (e.g. socioeconomics, health care, etc.). In attempting to understand educational inequity, we also explore the cultural history of the state because it is critical in shaping the continued marginalization of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in today's educational systems.

People. There are more than 6 million people in Tennessee, of which more than 20% come from CLD backgrounds. Most residents, especially those identified as CLD, live in urban areas, particularly in the western portion of the state which includes Memphis. Statewide, one in five children lives in poverty. People identified as White earn more than their Black peers, regardless of educational level. Individuals from CLD backgrounds have lower median household income, and higher rates of unemployment, poverty, and lack of health coverage. People identified as Black are also more likely to suffer negative health outcomes, such as mortality from diabetes, cancer, or heart disease, and death from accidents or violence.

There are currently more than 925,000 students in the Tennessee school system, 25% of whom are identified as Black. More than 4% are identified as Hispanic, and there is a rapidly growing population of students identified as English language learners.

More than 15% of Tennessee students are identified as disabled. At the state-level, students identified as Black are only slightly more likely than their White counterparts to receive special education services, while other minority groups tend to be underrepresented in special education and in each of the high-incidence disability categories. Compared to most other states, overall special education risk is low for students identified as CLD. However, when state-level patterns of identification in specific categories are examined, students identified as Black are more than 3 times more likely than their White peers to be identified as intellectually disabled, and they are approximately 20% more likely to be identified as emotionally disturbed. At the local education agency (LEA) level, elevated risk ratios in each of the high-incidence categories are common. Across all groups, more than 63% of students receiving special education services spend the majority of their time in general education settings. However, students identified as Black or American Indian are more likely to be placed in the most restrictive settings.

Students identified as CLD and those identified as disabled consistently perform less well than their peers on statewide assessments, and are less likely to enroll in AP courses, be identified for gifted/talented programs, or graduate high school. Students identified as Black and students with disabilities are also disproportionately subjected to disciplinary consequences, including suspension, expulsion, and placement in alternative schools.

Policy. Recent policy changes have emphasized local control, accountability, and increased state funding of education. Unfortunately, urban school systems continue to be disadvantaged by funding formulas and respond to budget shortfalls in ways that potentially limit students' opportunities to learn, such as reducing school hours and increasing class size. Tennessee's model of AYP is problematic because it potentially inflates schools' performance, thereby reducing the state's responsibility to students and families in poorly performing schools.

Despite state efforts to recruit teachers from diverse backgrounds, the vast majority of Tennessee educators are White. While many have a master's degree or higher, students identified as CLD have less access to experienced, effective teachers. State policy allows few opportunities for teacher evaluation and provides LEAs with limited ability to remove ineffective educators. This is particularly troubling given evidence that students identified as CLD are more likely to be taught by teachers considered to be "least effective."

The state's criteria for determining significant disproportionality is also problematic as the restricted nature of the definition excludes much of the disparity in special education identification and positions what many seeking equity would consider unfavorable. Tennessee has a long history of overrepresentation of students identified as Black among those identified as ID, and while concerted efforts have been made to address disproportionality, more work is needed.

Practice. Tennessee has made notable efforts to improve outcomes for students. The state's Education Improvement Act helped reduce inequity in school funding and increased accountability for student outcomes.

Unfortunately, continued discrepancies in funding, particularly for urban schools which serve the majority of the state's diverse students and a persistent achievement gap between students identified as CLD and their peers underscore the need for continued reform.

The state has created a charter school system that provides meaningful opportunities for students who were previously unsuccessful in traditional public schools, but few students currently benefit from this option. Some school systems are now adopting positive, proactive discipline approaches such as character education and school-wide positive behavior support, but the state policy of Zero Tolerance and its system of alternative schools, many of which are of questionable quality, continue to disproportionately affect students identified as CLD and those with disabilities.

Faced with increasing populations of students identified as CLD and a large proportion of students identified as Black, the state has made several commendable efforts to recruit teachers from diverse backgrounds, though their numbers remain low. The state's professional development system focuses on accountability, systems thinking, and constructivism. Tennessee's system of Family Resource Centers provides a critical network linking families and communities to resources in a variety of domains. While each of these initiatives is commendable, there is still work to be done to achieve equity and promote cultural responsiveness.
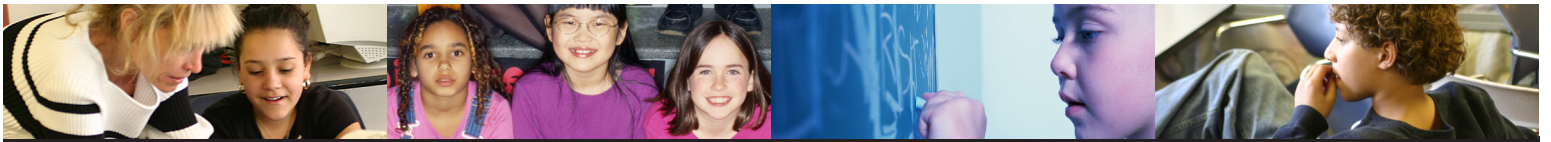
Recommendations. Taking into consideration the contextual factors of the state, data on general and special education outcomes, and the current policy landscape, we recommend some specific areas of improvement in moving towards the development of culturally responsive educational systems:

1. *Addressing Disproportionality –* All LEA improvement plans submitted to the state should be inclusive of their work to address disproportionality. The disproportionate representation of students identified as CLD in special education is not just a special education issue. It must be understood as a product of education as a cultural practice and inequity in the system at large, not only as an issue of special education identification. The State's new requirements for the Comprehensive School Performance Plans hold great promise for creating important inquiry at the local level surrounding the complex issue of disproportionality.
2. *Strategic Planning –* The state must have a long-term plan for redressing continued disproportionality in special education. Necessary changes to policy and practice must be explored. What's more, state definitions of significant disproportionality must be reexamined as these guide much of the disproportionality work. While the state context is complex, setting transparent goals for the future is an important aspect of transforming current realities. We acknowledge the varying viewpoints on this perspective. We suggest that the state develop and publish a long-term plan for addressing continued disproportionality. What's more, state definitions of disproportionality must be tightened as LEAs engage these issues with greater levels of understanding and improvement in strategies for eliminating disproportionality. The state

should engage in continuous and iterative improvements in its policies, procedures and practices in order to eliminate disproportionality. It is critical to laud the state for its progress in addressing disproportionality but state level planning is needed to sustain efforts and bring them to scale throughout the state.

3. *Comprehensive Change –* The state must examine inequity in other systems as they relate and contribute to inequitable educational outcomes and disproportionality in special education. Because educational systems exist within a broader context, it is unlikely that true parity can be achieved in education if the disparities in other institutions go unaddressed. Comprehensive systemic change will require coordinated efforts between multiple systems, including health care, social services, mental health, education, and other branches of government.
4. *Professional Learning –* Professional learning must include content around cultural responsiveness. How is professional learning promoting education for all through evidence-based instruction, curriculum, and intervention? There must also be a thoughtful discourse around teacher preparation and licensure programs regarding the knowledge, skills, and capacities of educators to ensure that practitioners are equipped to produce positive results for students identified as CLD.
5. *Universal Prevention –* The state should examine how powerful universal access to early intervening services can be provided for all students. Such efforts are necessary for ensuring all children have high quality opportunities to learn in order to address the gaps in educational outcomes.

Creating equitable, culturally responsive systems is a high-stakes task. If done well, the state will increase it intellectual capital, create the possibility of expanding its economic base, and increase the quality of life for its citizens. Tennessee has initiatives in place that can be built upon to promote such systems. Raising awareness, addressing difficult issues, and engaging in ongoing reflection and evaluation of policy and practice are critical. Policy and professional learning must be translated into practice in ways that lead to systemic change at all levels of the educational system. Only through persistent, coordinated effort can systemic change that supports the learning of all students be achieved.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT?

This report provides a snapshot of Tennessee's efforts to provide for the education of students identified as having disabilities and students identified as CLD.[1] We use NCCRESt's conceptual framework for culturally responsive educational systems, which focuses on the connections between people, policies, and practices, to provide a schema for analyzing the relationships between federal, state, LEA, and school policies. As Klingner and colleagues (2005) state:

> Policies include those guidelines enacted at federal, state, LEA, 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).

Figure 1. Inside this Report

CREATING CONTEXT
 National
 State
PEOPLE
 Students
 Special Education Identification
 Special Education Placement
 Educational Outcomes
 Educators
POLICY
 Governance
 Funding
 Accountability
 Teacher Licensure & Evaluation
 Teacher Recruitment
 Charter Schools
 Discipline
PRACTICES
 Professional Development
 Discipline
 Response to Intervention
 Early Childhood Education
 Family Resource Centers
 Urban Education Improvement
 Least Restrictive Environment
 Disproportionality in Special Education

This report is organized by the NCCRESt 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 the ways in which they affect the practitioners employed within the system.[i] 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 complex interplay that must be examined to understand the current context of inequity in education and culturally responsive educational systems.

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?

Data for this report represent the most current publicly available data and were compiled from a variety of sources including state department websites, government documents, and reports. Specific references are provided at the end of the document. The report relies heavily on data from the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) and draws from a variety of other sources including the US Census, American Community Survey, Tennessee newspapers, Tennessee state department, and scholarly publications.

Figure 2. NCCRESt's Conceptual Framework

Equity in Schools
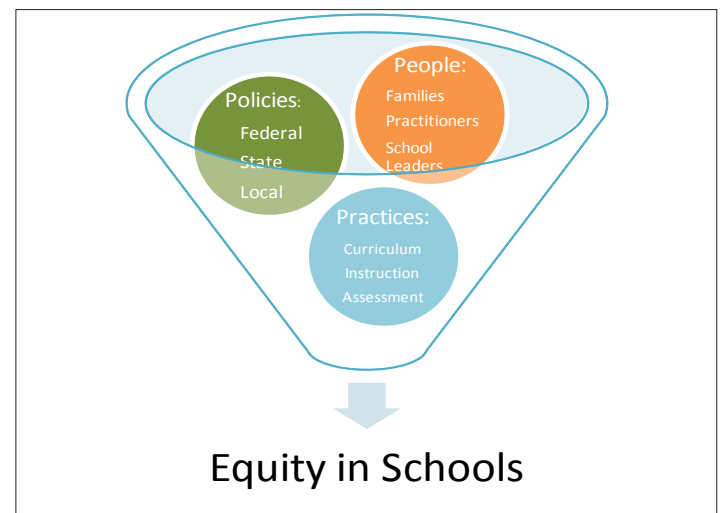
[1] This report uses the five federal racial categories (White, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian/Pacific Islander) as general terms that include people from a variety of cultural, national, linguistic, and racial backgrounds because these are the labels used by the state and because this is 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 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.
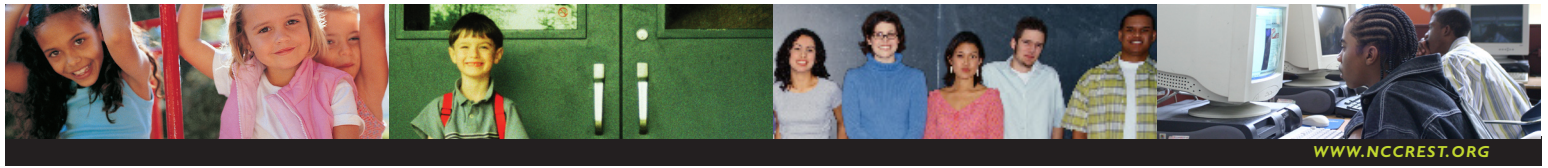
CREATING CONTEXT

Efforts to create culturally responsive educational systems must be understood within the socio-historical context of the individual state and of the nation. 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 are related to disparity in other domains (e.g. socioeconomics, health care, etc.). The marginalization of individuals from CLD backgrounds is not isolated to the educational system. In attempting to understand educational inequity, we explore the national and state context as 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 Tennessee'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.[ii] Much of the field is unprepared to provide appropriate, powerful opportunities to learn to students from diverse backgrounds.

In the four decades since Dunn[iii] first called attention to the overrepresentation of students from CLD backgrounds in classes for the intellectually disabled[2] (i.e., 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 at 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, local education agency (LEA), 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 identified as CLD 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 LEAs, breaking down the achievement data by race/ethnicity, language, SES, and disability status. NCLB requires states to identify schools that are not meeting adequate 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 influence in education, states have autonomy when defining their criteria for academic success.

NCLB & IDEA

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act affect policies and practices at every level of educational systems— state, district, school, classroom, and individual.

While NCLB has focused public and professional attention on educational outcomes through annual measurement of student progress, a focus on AYP and the disaggregation 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 (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Further, students identified as Black or Hispanic are more likely than students identified as White and Asian/Pacific Islander to be assigned to more segregated placements. In some parts of the United States, the disproportionate representation of students from CLD backgrounds in special education also includes those identified as American Indian.

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 with disabilities. Under the newest regulations, states must also have policies and procedures in place to prevent the inappropriate disproportionate representation of students identified as CLD in special education. States are required to 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 tasks 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).

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[2] While recognizing that most states use the term "mental retardation," we use "intellectual disability" because this is term preferred by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

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. 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, LEA, state and federal government, and society at large. Effective solutions to disproportionality 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 as well as through alternative programs (e.g., Title I).

STATE CONTEXT

Educational systems do not exist in isolation; that is, they are part of the broader social and societal context. In this section, we present data on the demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural-historical milieu of Tennessee in order to contextualize the information on the educational system that will be provided in later portions of this report. We seek to understand the context in which Tennessee schools are embedded, with particular attention to resources, access, and outcomes that may influence the experiences of students, families, and educators in schools.

Figure 3. Proportion of Tennessee Population by Race/Ethnicity
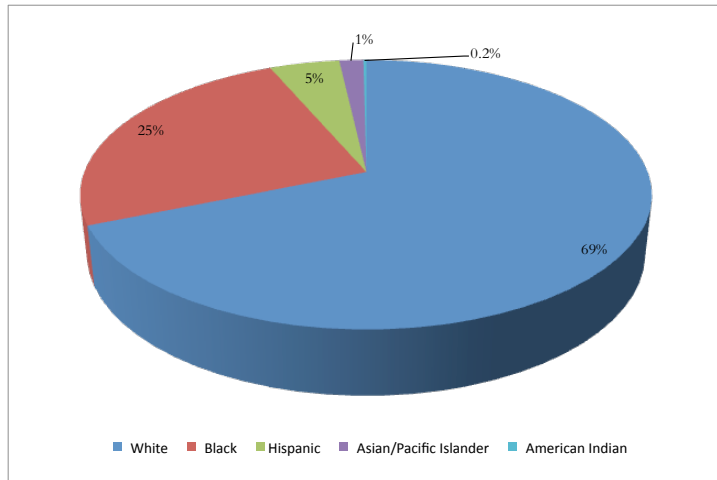
Population Demographics. Tennessee, the 16th most populous state in the nation, is home to over 6 million people. Of these, 77% identify as White, 17% as Black, 3% as Hispanic, 1% as Asian, and 0.3% as American Indian (see Figure 3). Approximately 3% of residents

are foreign-born and 5% speak languages other than English in their homes. Individuals under 18 years of age constitute nearly 24% of the population. Additionally, individuals with disabilities constitute 19% of the total population.

Geography

Located in the southeastern U.S., the state is divided into three main regions. The western region includes the city of Memphis and numerous river towns,[iv] as well as widespread lowlands and swamplands formerly occupied by the Chickasaw Nation, now used for pasture and croplands.[v] The central region includes Nashville, the state capital, which is surrounded by pasturelands and forest home to many of the state's rural communities. East Tennessee features the Appalachian Mountains, in addition to some of the state's larger cities, including Knoxville and Chattanooga.

Figure 4. Tennessee Map Taken from iz.carnegiemnh.org

Population Distribution.

The majority of Tennessee's populations, 76%, live in metropolitan areas. The state's largest city, Memphis, is home to more than 670,000 people. The next largest cities are Nashville, with 546,000 residents, Knoxville, with 178,000, and Chattanooga with 154,000.[vi]

Residents identified as White are primarily concentrated in the eastern region, while those identified as Black are more likely to live in the western region. In particular, nearly half of all Black residents are found in Memphis, where they constitute nearly 60% of the city's total population. Substantial proportions of this group are also found in Nashville and Chattanooga, which are home to 16% and 6% of all Black residents, respectively. Memphis and Nashville are also home to many of the residents from other CLD backgrounds, and together include 39% of Asian residents, 36% of Hispanic residents, and 19% of American Indian residents.

Cultural-Historical Legacy[vii]

Like many states, Tennessee's history began with habitation of American Indian nations dating back several thousand years. During the mid-16th
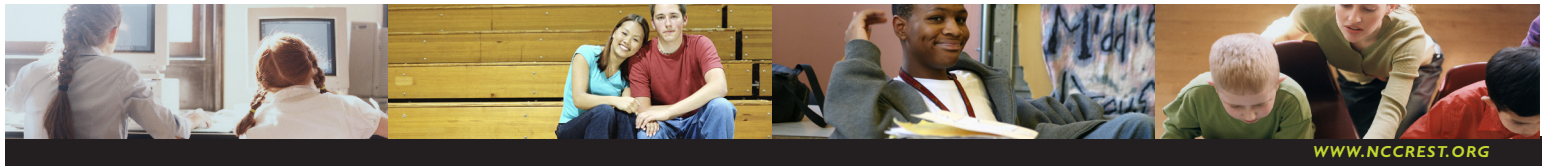
century came the arrival of Europeans settlers, who brought with them foreign diseases that began to decimate the native population and who pushed the tribes into the southwestern regions of the state. The displacement continued through the 1830s with the national policy of Indian removal.

During the early years of the state, planters in the central region brought with them African slaves, although for many years there were more subsistence farms than large-scale plantations or slaveholders. By the mid 1800s, however, cotton became a critical element of the state's economy and slaves came to constitute nearly a quarter of the state's total population and were largely concentrated in the western region of the state.

During the Civil War, Tennessee was one of the last states to join the Confederation, rejecting the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862 until the Confederates lost control in 1865. In the century that followed, the state witnessed discrimination and violence of national prominence, including the founding of the Ku Klux Klan, the enactment of Jim Crow Laws that segregated schools and other public institutions and establishments, and a ban on intermarriage. Tennessee also gained national attention during the early 1900s suffrage movement when women gained the right to vote before the 19th Amendment was passed because of the work of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association. In addition, the state gained notoriety in 1925 for its ban on the teaching of evolution in public schools.

Following the landmark decision in Brown v. Board of Education, desegregation proceeded slowly, but residents banded within religious and educational institutions, particularly Nashville Christian Leadership Conference, Fisk University, American Baptist Theological Seminary, and Vanderbilt University to support the civil rights movement. Nashville was the locale for a number of famous sit-ins and protests, including one famous march on city hall, in which protestors forced the mayor to admit that segregation was immoral. By the 1960s the state's universities were integrated. However, racial discord remained pervasive and in 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. The 1970s was a time of bussing, such as the court-ordered desegregation Plan Z in Memphis City Schools, and "white flight" in which the White residents of urban areas, particularly Memphis, increasingly moved out of the city and into suburbs, in addition to placing their children in private schools. From 1970 to 2000 the proportion of White residents was nearly reduced by half. The urban decay that followed has had lasting implications for urban educational systems. Today, the city's schools remain highly segregated.

Socioeconomics

Tennessee's economy is the 18th largest in the nation, dominated by the technology and transportation industries.[viii] Traditionally, the state's per capita income has fallen below national and regional averages. As of 2005, it was $30,952, just 89% of the national average.[ix] Median household income for people identified as Black was the lowest of any group in the state at just $27,166, while White residents earned an average of $38,189 (see Figure 5).[x] Even at the same level of education, people identified as Black earn less than their White peers.[xi] The overall unemployment rate was 4.9%, but for Black

males it was nearly 12%, and in Memphis, where the majority of the state's Black residents reside, it was nearly 6% overall.[xii] Additionally, nearly 45% of Black households were headed by females, compared to only 14% of White households.

Tennessee's poverty rate also exceeds the national average at 14.9%, with more than 21% of children classified as living in poverty. When examined by race, it is apparent that residents identified as Black or Hispanic are 2 to 2.5 times more likely to live in poverty that those identified as White.[xiii] What's more, the poverty rate in Shelby County, where Memphis is located, is more than 19%.[xiv] Additionally, people identified as Black are nearly 30% less likely to own homes, which has important implications for the accumulation of wealth via equity and the passage of wealth from one generation to another. [xv]In addition, people identified as Black represent nearly 47% of the prison population compared to 17% of the total state population.[xvi]

Figure 5. Median Household Income by Race/Ethnicity
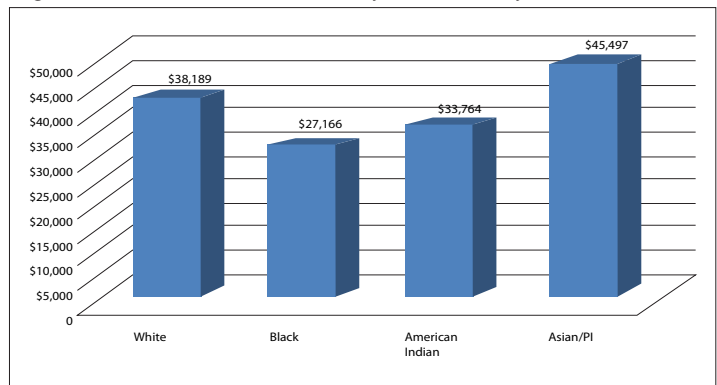
Health Care & Health Outcomes

In 1994, Tennessee established a healthcare reform entitled TennCare, which extended medical coverage to those uninsured or uninsurable persons under Medicaid. Unfortunately, in 2005, the program was narrowed, excluding most adults.[xvii] In 2006, 86% of Tennessee residents had health insurance, including 92% of children. TennCare provides coverage for most children living in poverty, but more than 40% of adults living in poverty continue to be uninsured.[xviii] Additionally, people identified as Black and Hispanic are overrepresented among the state's uninsured.

While Tennessee statistics on prenatal care and birth weight are comparable or better than national averages, statistics are poor for people identified as Black or Hispanic. For instance, women identified as Black were twice as likely as their White peers to receive no prenatal care and had an infant mortality rate 2.7 times higher than their White peers. Overall, the state ranked 47th in the nation for infant mortality with a rate of 9.3 deaths per 1,000 births, nearly 2/3 of which were linked to low birth weight.[xix] Additionally, the HIV infection rate and mortality rates for cancer, diabetes, and heart disease for people identified as Black are substantially higher than their White peers. The state ranks 32nd in the nation for teen deaths.[xx] Furthermore, Black males are substantially more likely to die from injury or violence.
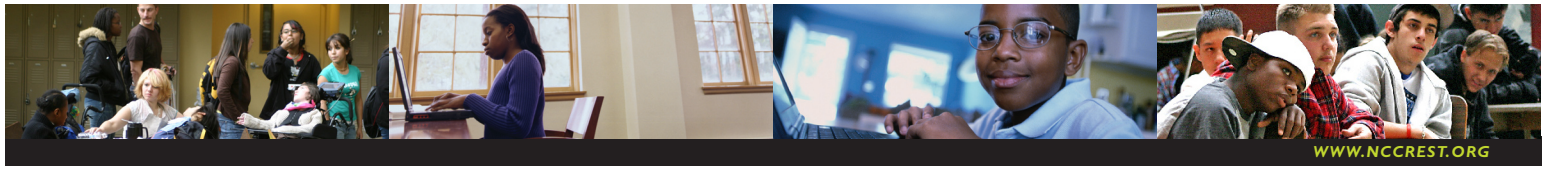
Politics

The political history of Tennessee is characterized by its complexity. Tennessee has provided three U.S. presidents, and has witnessed important sociopolitical changes, such as the Reconstruction period after the Civil War.[xxi] Tennessee's politics, like most other states, is dominated by the Democratic and Republican parties. After the Reconstruction period, Tennessee tended to lean toward the Democratic party. However, Democratic control began to dwindle in the late 1960's and early seventies. In 1970, Congressman Bill Brock defeated Al Gore Sr.'s Senate re-election bid, and Winfield Dunn became the first Republican governor in 50 years. The Republican party also took control of the state's delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives. Since that time, the two parties have been highly competitive. In fact, during the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, Tennessee was considered a "swing" state. Currently, Tennessee tends to be politically conservative, with the exceptions of Nashville and Memphis, which are relatively liberal.

> Inequities in education do not occur in isolation; they mirror disparity in the system as a whole, which is illustrated by persistent disparities in income, unemployment, incarceration, access to health insurance, and health outcomes.

SUMMARY

As we move into our examination of Tennessee'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 Tennessee's context 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. As we examine the domains of the educational system (i.e. people, policies, and practice), this context must be recognized as it influences the educational systems we will describe.

PEOPLE
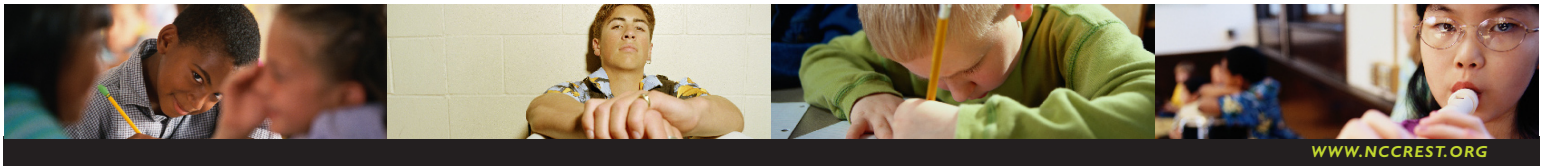
PEOPLE

Within our framework, "people" includes all those in the broader education system, including students, educators, administrators, families, and community members whose opportunities culturally responsive systems endeavor to improve. This section describes trends in Tennessee's student and teacher demographics, and explores a number of educational outcomes relevant to culturally responsive systems, including disproportionality in special education identification and placement, gaps in achieveme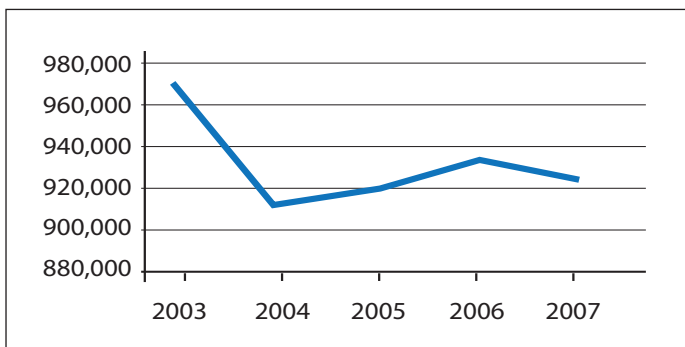nt and educational progress, and opportunities to learn. This section is important in understanding the people who are affected by educational systems and helps describe the current context of the education in the state.

Figure 6. Student Enrollment 2003-2007

Figure 7. Proportion of Tennessee Students by Race/Ethnicity

STUDENTS

Like many school systems throughout the nation, the Tennessee Department of Education has seen a slight decrease in total enrollment, approximately 5% (See Figure 7). During the 2006-2007 academic year (AY), 925,898 students attended Tennessee public schools.[xxii] Of these, more than 68% (688,017) were identified as White, with the remaining 30% identified as CLD (see Figure 6). Students identified as Black constitute the majority of this group, as they represent nearly 25% (248,334) of the student population. Students identified as Hispanic make up the next largest group at 4.65% (46,509). Students identified as Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American constitute the smallest proportion at 1.6% (15,726) and 0.2% (2,039), respectively.

Additionally, 2.9% (28,979) students are identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). While this percentage is considerably lower than the national average, it represents a seven-fold increase since 1994 when there were only 4,119 students identified as LEP in the state.[xxiii] This growth in the LEP population has occurred despite a 9% decrease in the total student population during the same time period. The proportion of students classified as economically disadvantaged is now more than 54% (495,606) and nearly 48% are eligible for free or reduced lunch.[xxiv] Over 38% of students, or 386,125, qualify as Title I.

SPECIAL EDUCATION IDENTIFICATION

Since 2000, there has been a slight downward trend in the proportion of students receiving special education services (see Figure 8). Across the state, 120,236 students, or 12.99%, are currently identified as having disabilities.
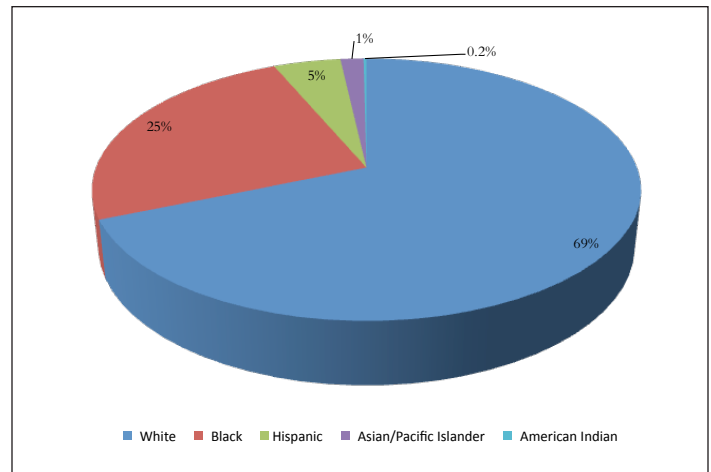
Figure 8. Percentage of Students Identified for Special Education by Year: 2000-2007
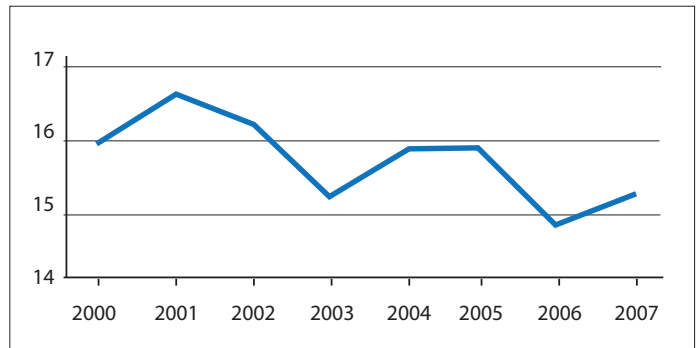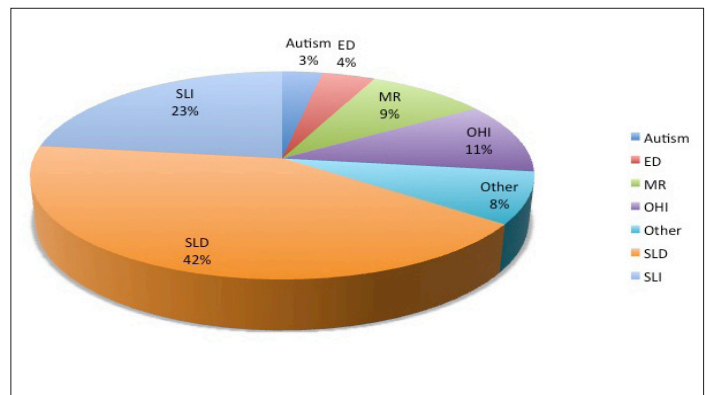

Figure 9. Proportion of Students Identified for Special education by Disability Category

Of these, 42% are identified as having a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and 23% are identified as having a Speech or Language Impairment (SLI).[xxv] The distribution of identified disabilities is shown in Figure 9. Disproportionality has been a persistent concern in special education. Figures 10 and 12 through 15 display the relative risk ratios for the four racial groups in special education overall, emotional disabilities (ED), specific learning disabilities (SLD), and speech/language impairments (SLI), and intellectual disabilities (ID). These particular categories are examined here because include the vast majority of students with disabilities and are widely regarded as the areas in which disproportionality is a concern due to the highly subjective nature of identification relative to the medically- or physically-based low-incidence categories.

The relative risk ratio provides a groups' risk of being identified in a particular category relative to White students.[3] 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 while 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).

As Figure 10 shows, only students identified as Black are more likely to be identified for special education overall, although the difference in risk is small. Students from all other racial/ethnic groups are underrepresented, that is, they are less likely to be identified for special education services than students identified as White, particularly students identified as Asian/Pacific Islander and Hispanic.

Figure 10: Relative Risk of Special Education Identification
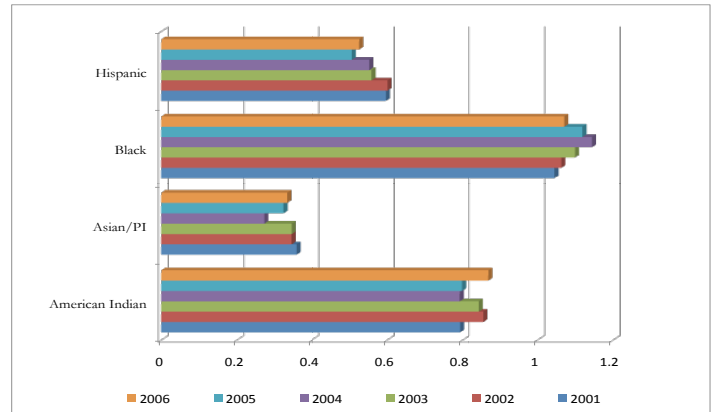
Figure 11. NCCRESt Disproportionality Data Maps
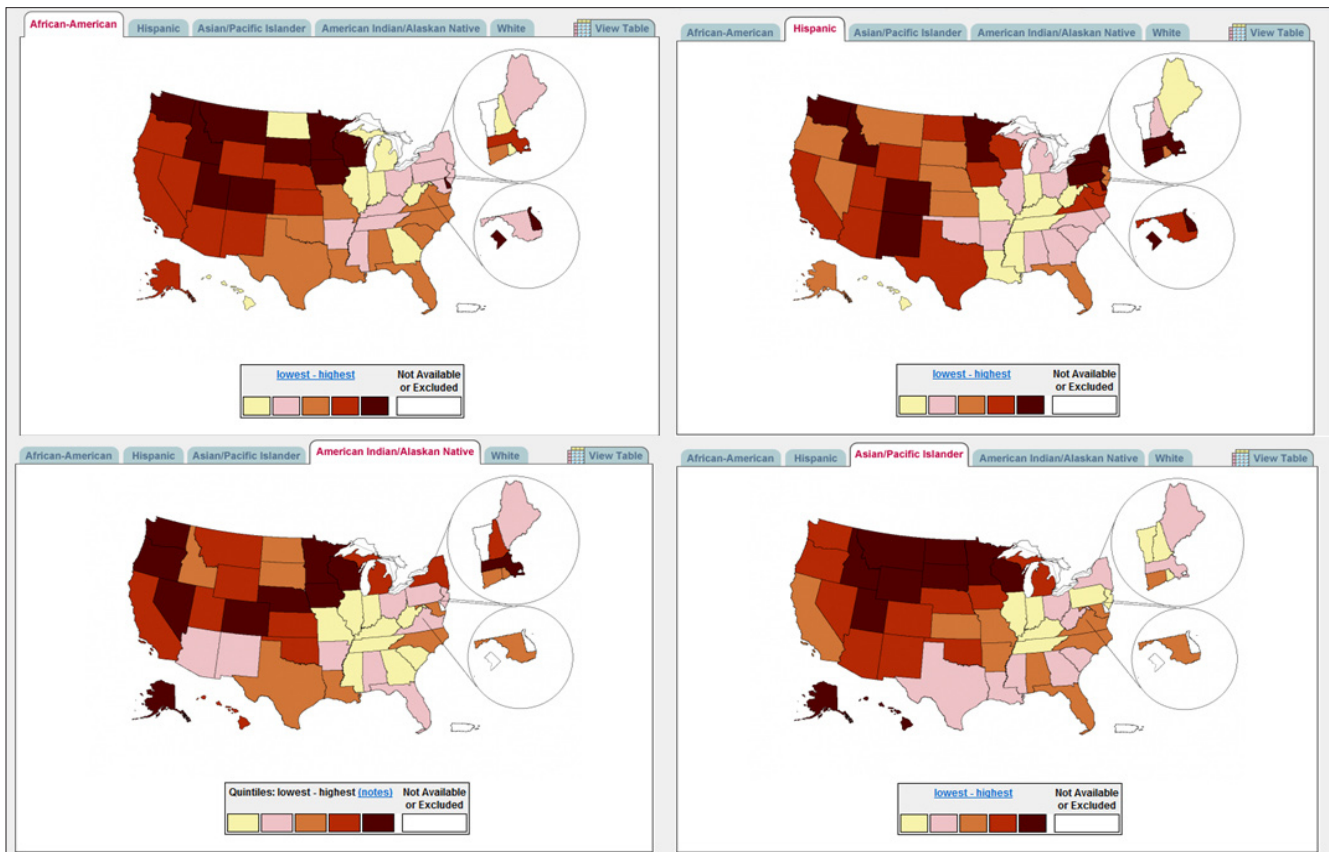
[3] Artiles and colleagues (2005) assert that White students should be used as the comparison group when examining the representation of CLD students, and provide the following rationale: "(a) White students have been traditionally used as a comparison group in equity analyses because they are the dominant group in society who have not had systematic problems with access and opportunity issues, (b) White students have been used histori-cally as a contrast group in this literature that facilitates trend analyses, and (c) White students can be used as a stable contrast group because various cultural and linguistic groups are compared to the same group" (p. 289). White students were also used as the comparison group in analysis by the National Research Council (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

Figure 11, taken from the Data Maps at NCCREST.org, shows disproportionality in speical education by race for the entire nation. For students identified as having disabilities in the race/ethnic categories of Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian/PI, risk of special education identification is among the lowest in the nation compared to all other states. Risk is low even for students identified as Black.

While students from CLD backgrounds tend to be underrepresented in special education overall in Tennessee, the data present a different picture within the specific disability categories. In the high-incidence disability categories, the data are more complex and students identified as Black or American Indian are frequently overrepresented in each of the high-incidence categories (See Figures 12-15).

In SLD, the relative risk for identification of students identified as Black and American Indian has been steadily increasing since 2001 and both groups are now more likely to be identified as SLD than their White peers (see Figure 12), although the difference in risk is not large. When compared to students identified as White, students identified as Hispanic are 40% less likely to be identified SLD and those identified as Asian/PI are nearly 80% less likely. In the ID category, students identified as Black and American Indian are more likely to be identified than their White peers, with this effect being most pronounced for students identified as Black, who are currently nearly three times more likely to be identified as ID (see Figure 13). Also, students identified as Hispanic and Asian/PI are less than half as likely to be identified in the same disability category.

Among those identified as ED, students identified as Black and American Indian are again more likely to be identified than students identified as White (see Figure 14). For students identified as Native American, risk has been highly variable from year to year, and both groups showed substantially lower risk in 2004. In the SLI category, all groups tend to be underrepresented relative to their White peers (see Figure 15).
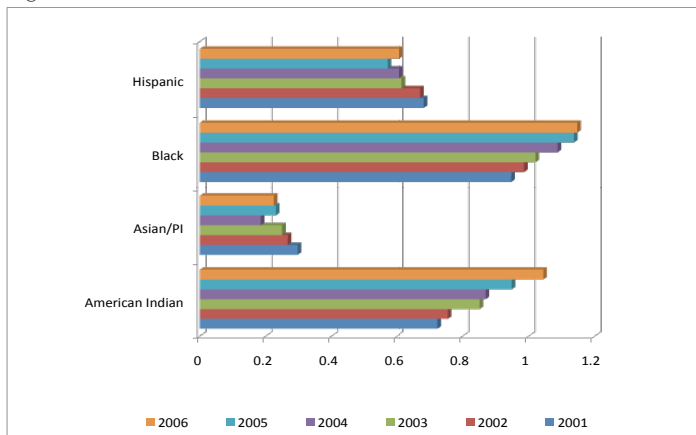
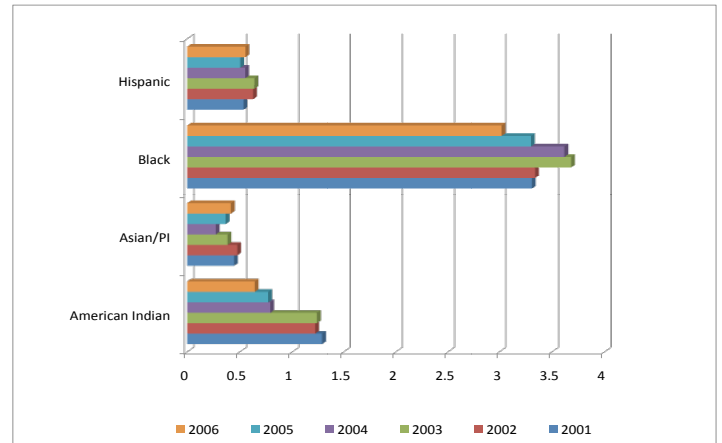Figure 13: Relative Ratios for Identification as ID

Figure 14: Relative Ratios for Identification as ED
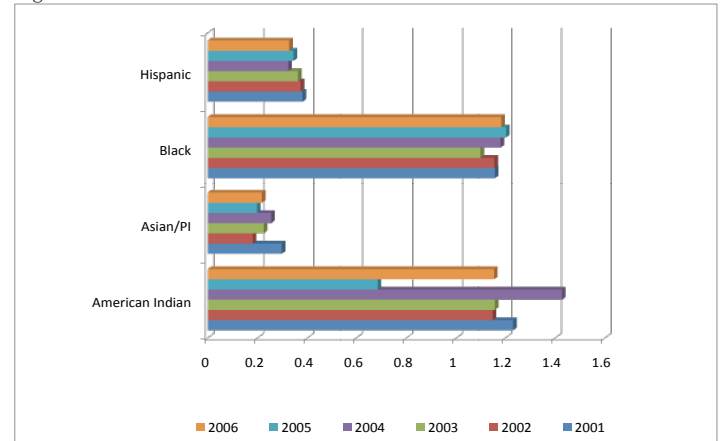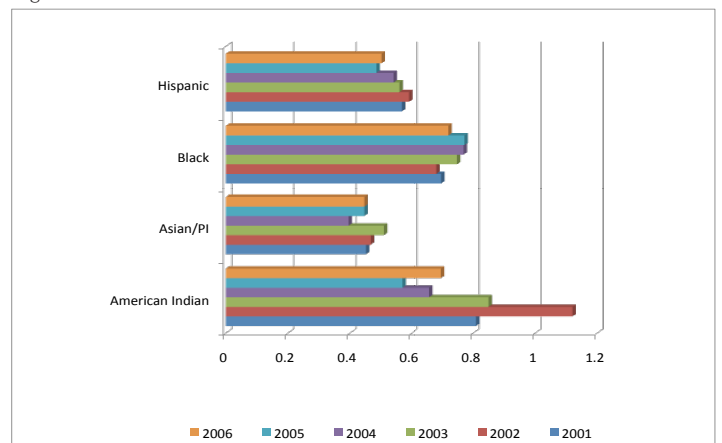

Figure 12: Relative Risk for Identification as SLD

Figure 15: Relative Risk Ratio for Identification as SLI
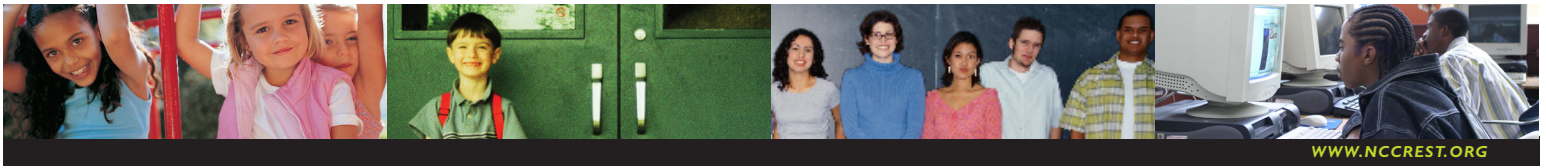
LEA-level data on relative risk were also available for the 2005 AY.[xxvi] Figures 16-18 show scatterplots of Tennessee LEAs' relative risk for overall special education identification, ED, ID, and SLD. These data are only presented for students identified as Black because this was the only group consistently overrepresented among those with disabilities. Across 123 LEAs, more than 75% had risk ratios greater than 1 for overall special education identification, with the average risk ratio being 1.38. For ED, only 38% had risk ratios above 1, but because of the high relative risk in many LEAs, the average risk ratio was 1.37. For the ID category, the average relative risk was 2.30 and 64% of LEAs had ratios greater than 1. Finally, in SLD, 71% of LEAs had risk ratios greater than 1, with an average risk ratio of 1.24.

These data underscore the importance of examining data at multiple levels (i.e. state and LEA, overall identification and specific disability categories).

Examining the data at only one level can obscure meaningful trends in identification and risk. The data emphasize that disproportionality of students identified as CLD, and particularly those who are Black, is a cause for concern in many LEAs and in many of the high-incidence disabilities.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PLACEMENT

Compared to the national average,[xxvii] Tennessee students receiving special education are slightly more likely to spend the majority of their time in the general education classroom. Overall, more than 63% of students with disabilities are placed in the general education classroom for at least 80% of the day. Less than 11% are removed more than 60% of the day, and 1.76% are in private or separate settings, such as separate schools, residential placements, or homebound services.[xxviii] Figure 20 displays the risk of placement in each setting as measured by the relative risk ratio using Whites as the comparison

Figure 16: Distribustion of District RRR for Student Identified as Black in Special Education

Figure 18: Distribution of District RRR for Students Identified as Black as SLD

Figure 17: Distribution of District RRR for Students Identified as Black as ED

Figure 19: Distribution of District RRR for Students Identified as Black as ID

group. Among students identified to receive special education services, students identified as Black are slightly more likely than their peers 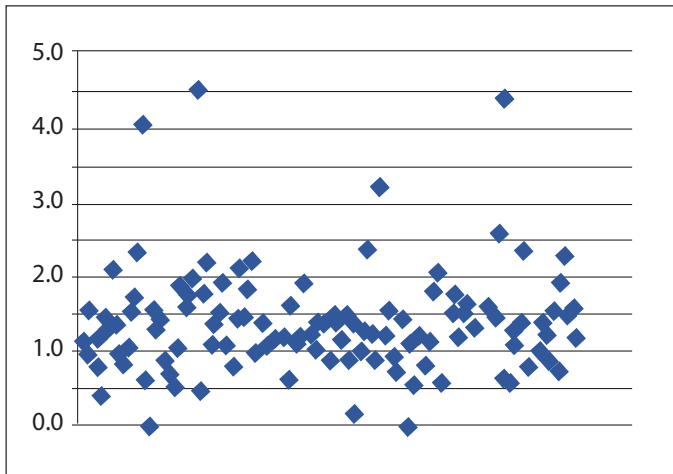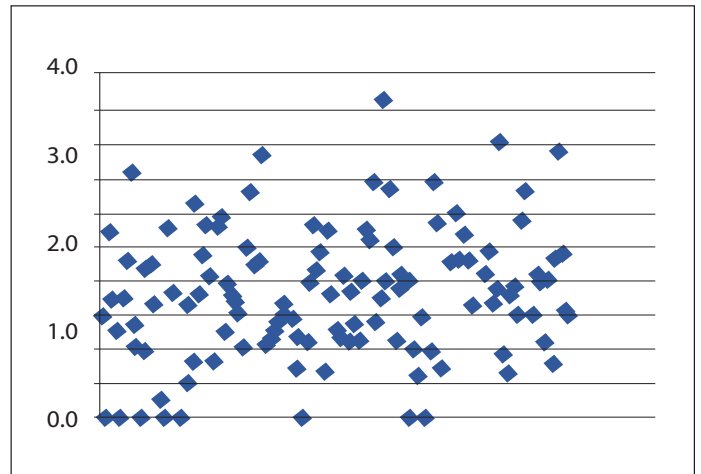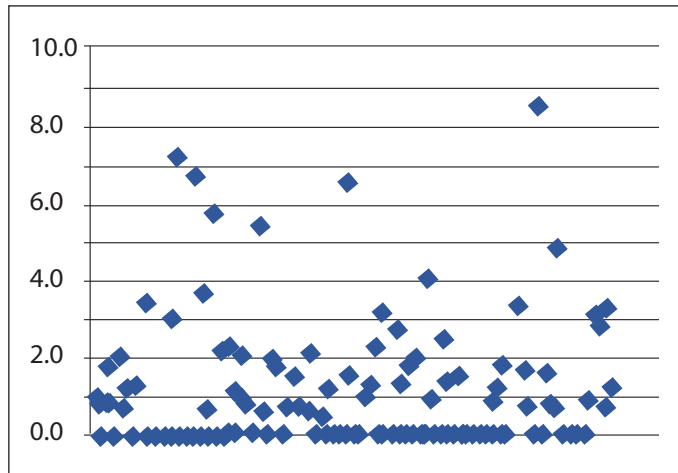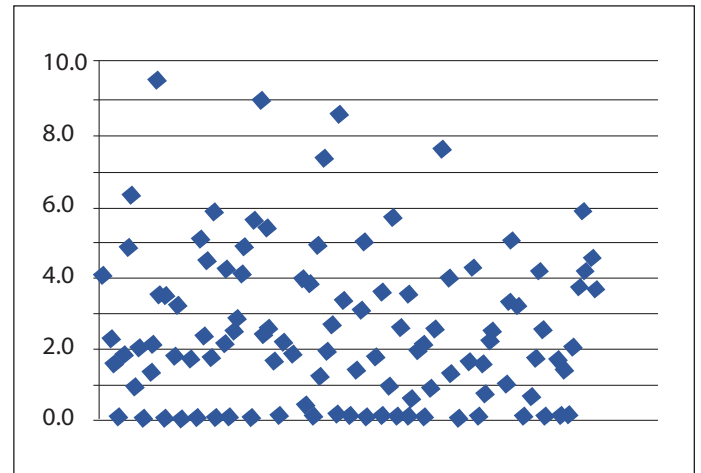to be placed in the least restrictive environment; that is, to be removed from the general education environment less than 21% of the day. Two-thirds of students identified as Black who receive special education are served in this placement category. This group is substantially more likely to be removed 21-60%, but much less likely to be removed more than 60%. While this data is promising, students identified as Black are substantially more likely, about 2 times, to be placed in separate schools and are nearly 9.5 times more likely to be served in correctional facilities than their White peers. Students identified as American Indian are less likely to receive services in the least restrictive environment and are 2.5 times more likely to be served in residential facilities than their White peers.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and General Education Outcomes

When compared to national averages, Tennessee students perform below the mean on the NAEP in both reading and math (see Table 1),[xxix] despite statewide improvements in performance over previous years. The proportion of children attending preschool currently falls below the national average. The proportion of students graduating high school is over 72%, which exceeds the average among states. However, Tennessee students are less likely to receive high scores on Advanced Placement (AP) exams or to attend postsecondary institutions. Moreover, the average ACT score for the state lags behind the national average, but represents a steady improvement over earlier years.

Figure 20: Relative Risk of Placement is the Leas Restrictive Environment by Race/Ethnicity
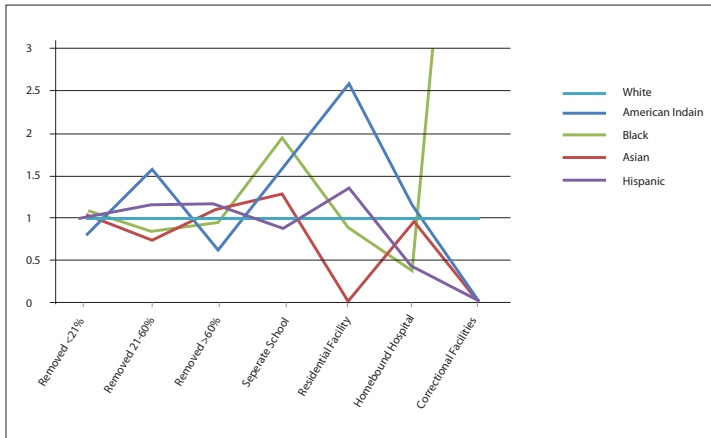
Statewide Assessment

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) is the statewide, mandated student assessment program for public school students. TCAP includes the Achievement Test for grades 3 thru 8, the Competency Test, the Gateway Tests, and End of Course Tests. Figures 21-24 present the performance of various student groups on TCAP assessments in mathematics

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES: TENNESSEE V. NATIONAL AVERAGE ACROSS DOMAINS

GRADE	TENNESSE AVERAGE	RANKING	NATIONAL AVERAGE
3 AND 4-YEAR OLDS ENROLLED IN PRESCHOOL	36.4%	37	46.1%
ELIGIBLE CHILDREN ENROLLED IN KINDERGARTEN	74.5	40	75.7
4TH GRADE STUDENTS PROFICIENT ON NAEP IN READING	26.9	41	31.7
4TH GRADE STUDENTS PROFICIENT ON NAEP IN MATH	28.7	46	38.6
8TH GRADE STUDENTS PROFICIENT ON NAEP IN READING	25.6	41	29.2
8TH GRADE STUDENTS PROFICIENT ON NAEP IN MATH	23.1	46	31.0
SCORES OF 3 OR HIGHER PER 100 STUDENTS ON AP TESTS	8.7	37	16.9
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GRADUATING WITH A DIPLOMA	72.2	25	69.9

and reading/language; that is, the Achievement Tests for grades K thru 8, and the Gateway Tests for grades 9-12 for the 2006 AY.[xxx] In general, with the exception of students identified as Asian, students from CLD backgrounds perform less well than their White peers in all areas. This is especially true of students identified as Black, who constitute nearly a quarter of all students.

As the graphics show, overall, the vast majority of students achieve proficiency or better on the assessment. For both math and reading/language in grades K thru 8, less than 10% of all students score Below Proficiency (see Figures 21 and 23). When disaggregated by race; however, it is apparent that considerably more students identified as Black and Hispanic score in the lowest range and compared to their White, Asian, and American Indian peers, they are less likely to score in the Advanced range. Students identified as economically disadvantaged are also less likely to perform in the Advanced range. Students identified as disabled perform the poorest on the assessment, with approximately 35% falling Below Proficiency in math and 25% falling Below Proficiency in reading/language. In reading, students identified as LEP are even more likely to fall in the lowest range.

In high school, students do better on the reading than math assessments in general (see Figures 22 and 24). The performance of students identified as Black continues to fall below that of students identified in the other racial/ethnic groups. Among those identified as LEP, students are more likely to perform in the lowest and highest ranges on both the math and reading/language assessments than LEP students in the primary grades.

Students identified with disabilities are less likely to perform well on the math portions of the Gateway assessment, with nearly half of these students
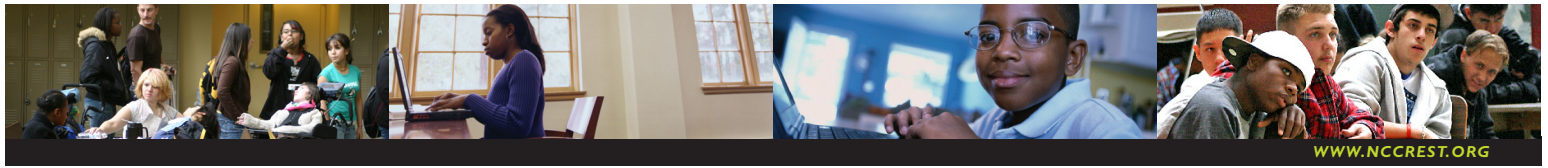
Figure 21: Performance on the TCAP in Mathematics by Group (K-8)

Figure 23: Perfomance on the TCAP n Reading by Group (K-8)
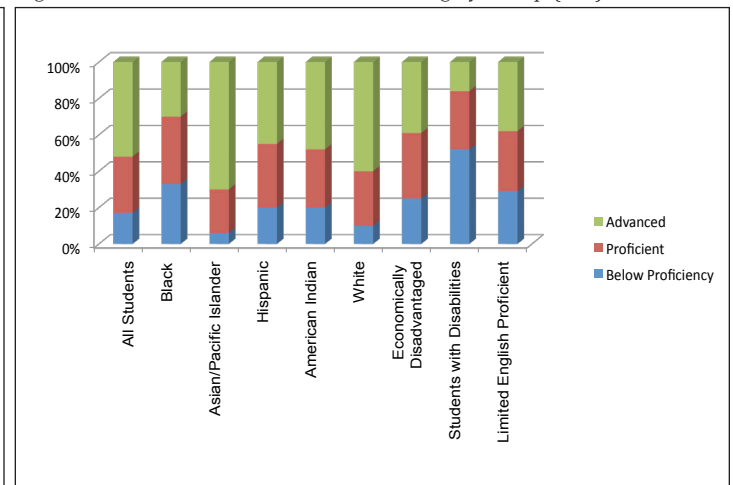
Figure 22: Performance on the TCAP in Mathematics by Group (9-12)
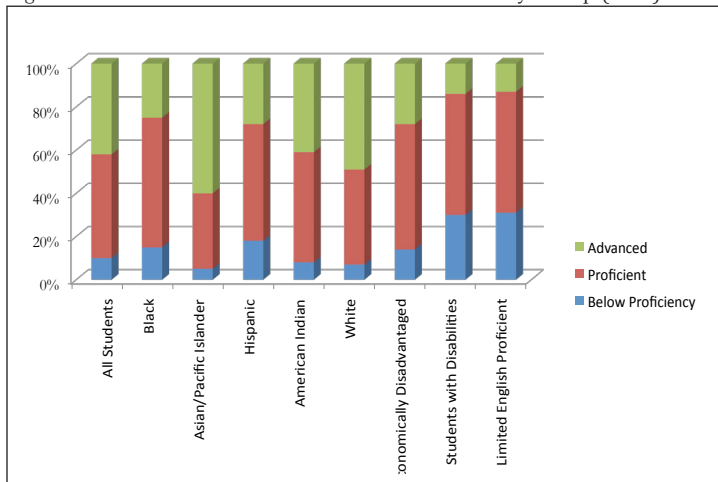
Figure 24: Perfomance on the TCAP in Reading by Group (9-12)
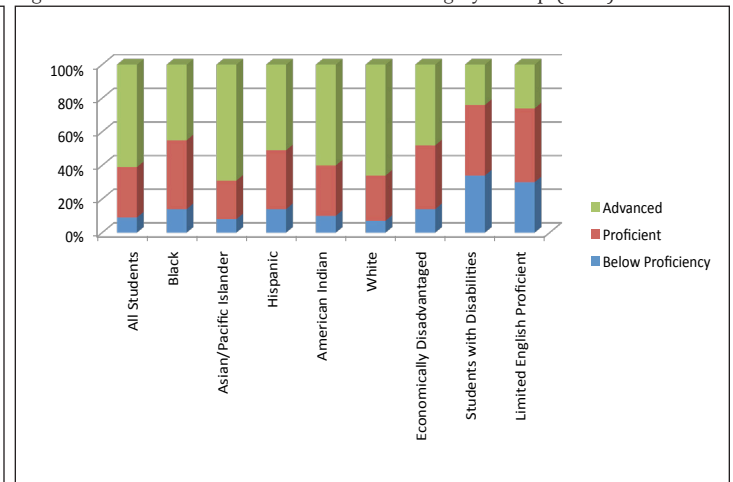
scoring Below Proficiency. Among students with disabilities, more than 45% percent are administered the standard TCAP with no accommodation in reading, and nearly 65% receive no accommodations in math. Less than 9% are administered the TCAP Alternate Portfolio Assessment for students with disabilities who are determined eligible for alternative assessment.[xxxi]

FOn the state's Gateway exam, required for high school completion, students identified as African American had the lowest rates of passing scores of students identified as CLD. Additionally, students identified as ELLs, as disabled, and as low-income were also less likely to pass the exam than the state average.

Advanced Placement

State data from the Office of Civil Rights show that students identified as White constitute the majority of students enrolled in AP courses (see Figure 25). [xxxii] Although they make up a quarter of the state's total enrollment, students identified as Black compose only 10% of enrollment in AP courses. Students

identified as American Indian and Hispanic are also underrepresented in AP enrollment. Overall, the rate of students participating in the tests falls below the national average as AP courses are not widely available throughout the state.[xxxiii]

Gifted and Talented Enrollment

In 2004, approximately 3.3% of Tennessee students were considered gifted or talented (G/T), compared to 6.7% nationally. Figure 26 shows a comparison of G/T enrollment by race. Students identified as White or Asian are most likely to be identified. For students identified as Black, their rate of G/T identification exceeds national rates. All other groups are underrepresented in G/T relative to national figures.[xxxiv]

Discipline

Approximately 9% of Tennessee students have been suspended or expelled (see Figure 27).[xxxv] When disaggregated by race/ethnicity, substantial disparities are apparent. Students identified as Black are 3.6 times more likely to be suspended and five times more likely to be expelled than their White

Figure 25: Proportion of Students in AP Courses by Race/Ethnicity

Legend: ■ American Indian ■ Asian/PI ■ Hispanic ■ Black ■ White

(Pie chart showing: 5%, 10%, 84%)
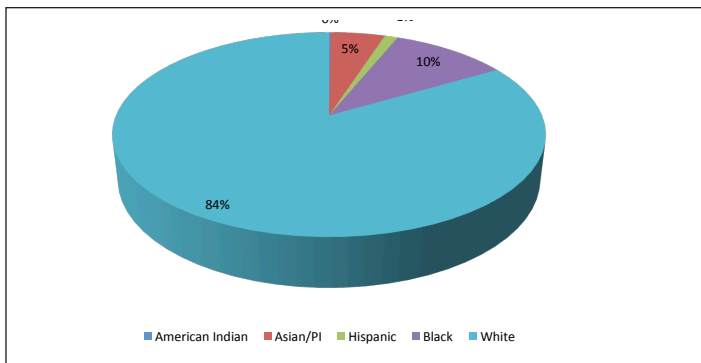
peers. Students identified as Hispanic and American Indian are approximately 25% more likely to be suspended, but are no more likely to be expelled than students identified as White. To put it another way, while students identified as Black constitute 25% of total school enrollment, they represent nearly 42% of students suspended and nearly 50% of students expelled.[xxxvi] In the state's largest school system, in which 85% of students are identified as Black, nearly 22% of students were suspended or expelled during the 2005 academic year.[xxxvii]

In an analysis conducted by the state, 26% of LEAs were identified as having a significant discrepancy in the proportion of students identified as disabled who are suspended or expelled, relative to their total enrollment.[xxxviii] Among students identified as disabled, more than half of suspensions and expulsions are of students identified as Black,[xxxix] even though they only constitute 27% of all students identified as disabled. Additionally, 2.35% of students with disabilities receive long-term suspensions or expulsions.[xl]

Tennessee has a zero tolerance policy in place. There were approximately 4.5 incidences per 1000 students, primarily drug offenses, which fell under the policy. Nearly 13% of students affected were expelled from school, just over half were returned to school or placed in alternative settings, and the remainder dropped out. Students identified as Black or disabled are disproportionately affected by this policy. Most offenses occurred between 6th and 12th grade.[xli] Within the

Figure 26: Percentage of Students Identified as Gifted/Talented by Race/Ethnicity
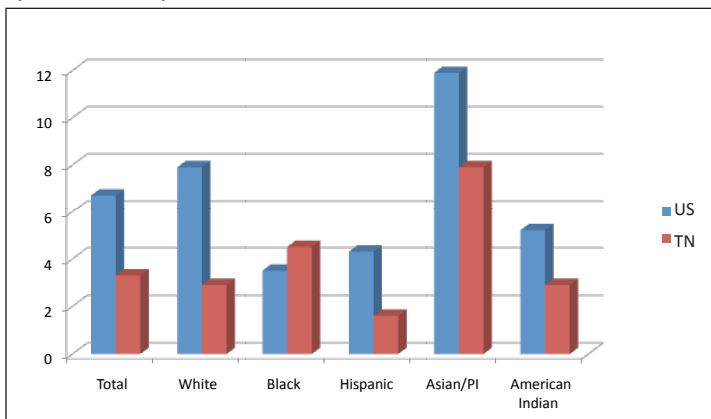
juvenile justice system, youth identified as CLD make up more than 54% of those in confinement, and 60% of those who will be tried as adults, despite constituting only 21% of individuals under 18.[xlii]

Retention & Graduation

The 2006 AY promotion rate was 97% and graduation was 81.8%. This is an improvement over earlier years, when Tennessee's graduation rate was among the lowest in the country.[xliii] In Memphis City Schools (MCS), the state's largest system which serves close to half of all students identified as Black in the state, the graduation rate was only 66%.[xliv] Among students identified with disabilities, only 55.4% graduate, while 16.4% dropout.[xlv] Of the 2005 graduates, more than 93% received regular diplomas, 5.7% received special education diplomas and 0.7% received certificates of attendance.

Figure 27: Percentage of Student Suspended and Expelled by Race/Ethnicity

Legend: ■ % Suspensions ■ % Explusions
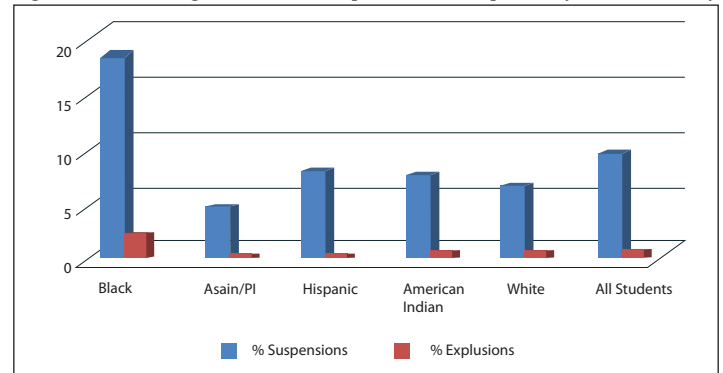
In 2004, there was a marked disparity in rates of high school dropouts.[xlvi] Students identified as White dropped out at a rate of 7.9%. For students identified as Black or Hispanic, the dropout rate was between 17 and 18%. For students identified as Asian/PI it was 9.9%, and for students identified as American Indian it was 5.3%. Overall, the state ranks 45th in the nation for high school dropouts, and 42nd for the percentage of teens who are not in school or working.

EDUCATORS

There are nearly 61,000 teachers and more than 3,800 administrators in the Tennessee school system. The student-teacher ratio is approximately 16 to 1.[xlvii] Figure 28 displays the distribution of qualifications of educators, showing that the majority have at least a master's degree or higher. More than 97% of core courses are taught by teachers identified as highly qualified.[xlviii] The courses most frequently taught by teachers who are not highly qualified are those for students in special education (i.e. self-contained classes and modified programs) and English as a Second Language. Approximately 7% of all teachers were new hires during the 2004 AY, while just over 9% had more than 30 years of teaching experience. Each year approximately 4-5% of teachers leave the field for reasons other than retirement.

A comparison of the racial/ethnic composition of Tennessee's students and teachers is presented in Figure 29. Approximately 10% of educators

identify themselves as Black, compared to a quarter of all students.[xlix] Nearly 40% of schools with students identified as Black enrolled have a smaller proportion of CLD teachers than students. LEAs with the highest proportion of Black enrollment seemed to have the greatest disparity in this respect. For instance, more than 86% of Memphis students are identified as

Figure 28: Proportion of Teachers by Level of Qualification
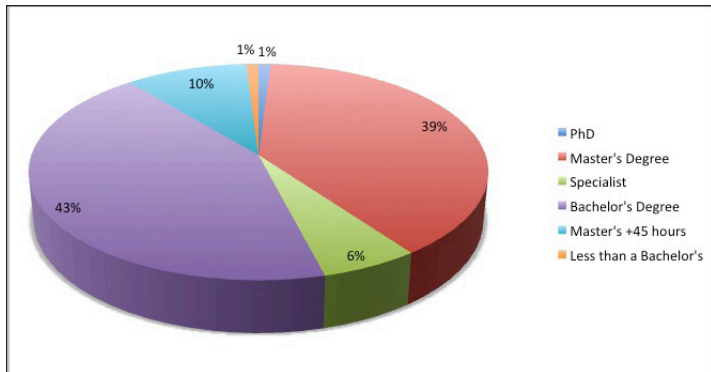
Black but only 46.21% of teachers are identified in this racial group. Other school systems, such as Humboldt and Haywood, have similar differentials in the demographics of the student population and the teaching staff. Further, while there are only three school systems with no students identified as Black enrolled, there are 25 which have no teachers who are identified as Black.

Despite the rising Hispanic population, the proportion of teachers identified as Hispanic is only 0.24%. Teachers identified as Asian or American Indian are similarly underrepresented in the teaching force. Additionally, only 19% of the teaching force is male, while nearly 52% of the student population is.

In a 2007 analysis of teacher education and experience across schools with varying proportions of students identified as CLD and as economically disadvantaged, the TDOE found that schools with high proportions of students identified as CLD or as economically disadvantaged had more beginning teachers and fewer teachers with master's degrees.[l] Using the state's value-added model of student assessment data, it has also been shown that schools with high proportions of students identified as CLD or as economically disadvantaged have lower percentages of teachers who are considered to be "most effective" and higher percentages of teachers considered to be "least effective." What's more, while many of the beginning teachers in high poverty or high CLD schools are among the state's "most effective," they often leave such schools or lose their effectiveness over time.

SUMMARY

Tennessee's school system serves a diverse student body. More than 30% of students come from CLD backgrounds, the majority of whom are identified as Black. The proportion of students identified as LEP currently stands at just under 3%, a figure that has been steadily increasing since 1999. Like many school systems, there is substantial disparity between the demographics of students and those of teachers, of whom only 11% identify CLD. Moreover, students identified as CLD have less access to experienced, effective teachers.

Over 15% of all Tennessee students receive special education. At the state level, students identified as Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian/Pacific Islander are underrepresented among those served while students identified as Black are roughly equally likely to receive special education compared to their White peers. Compared to other states, the relative risk of CLD students for identification is low. Within the high-incidence categories, CLD students are also likely to be underrepresented, although students identified as Black are 10-20% more likely than their White peers to be identified as SLD and ED. When examined at the LEA level, it is apparent that students identified as Black are frequently overrepresented among those students identified as having disabilities overall, and in the specific categories of ID and SLD especially. Furthermore, students identified as Black and American Indian are disproportionately placed in the most restrictive placements for students with disabilities.

Figure 29: Percentage of Students and Teachers by Race/Ethnicity
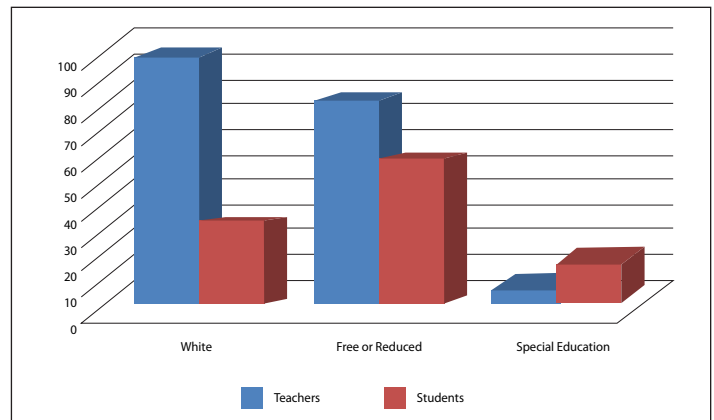
Examination of data on educational outcomes shows that compared to other states, Tennessee students are more likely to graduate but score below the national average in reading and math on the NAEP and are less likely to perform well on AP exams. Data from the state's mandated assessment program show that, with the exception of students identified as Asian, students from CLD backgrounds perform less well than their White peers in all areas of the assessment. Performance was particularly low for students identified as Black, who constitute nearly a quarter of all enrollment. Students identified as disabled performed lowest on the exam, with 25-35% failing to demonstrate proficiency in reading or math. At the high school level, the gap between the performance of students identified as LEP and their peers widens. This disparity in outcomes extends to the discipline domain, where students identified as Black are 3 times more likely to be suspended and 5 times more likely to be expelled.

The information presented here reveals a persistent pattern of inequity in educational outcomes. These patterns highlight the necessity to examine data disaggregated by groups and level (e.g. state v. LEA). It also underscores the importance of examining educational policies and practices as they relate to opportunities to learn and educational outcomes for all students.
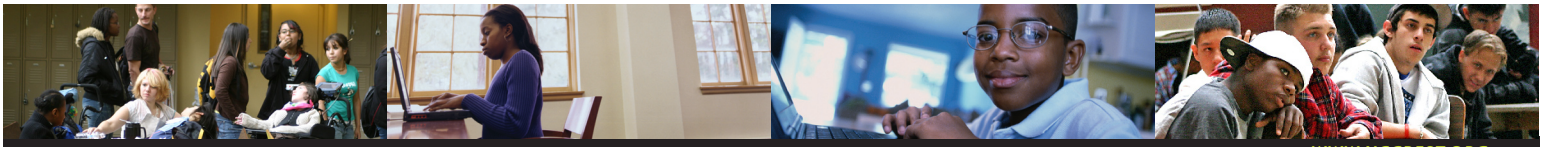
POLICY
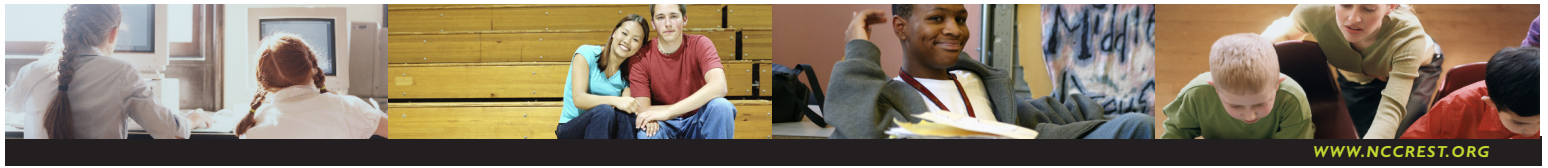
POLICY

Policies include guidelines enacted at federal, state, LEA, and school levels that influence funding, resource allocation, accountability, curriculum, instruction, and other key aspects of schooling. This section explores Tennessee's educational policies, with particular attention to the implication such policies have for students identified as CLD or disabled.

GOVERNANCE

There are currently 136 public local education agencies (LEAs, i.e., school districts) encompassing 16,999 schools in the state, as well as 86 private entities and 12 charters. Public LEAs are arranged in city LEAs, county LEAs, and special LEAs. Tennessee schools are governed by the State Board of Education, which is a governing and policy-making body that works with the TDOE, the agency that implements the Board's policies. The TDOE has limited regulatory authority as most educational issues fall under the jurisdiction of LEAs. Under the state's 1992 Education Improvement Act (EIA), uniformity in school governance was required. The EIA granted local school boards the sole authority to appoint LEA superintendents, whereas they could previously also be appointed by the county commissioner or selected via public election, and shifted hiring and personnel decisions to the superintendent and away from the school board. This change was part of an effort to apply a corporate model of school leadership in which accountability rested on the superintendent.[li]

FUNDING

School funding is determined by the state's Basic Education Program (BEP), a funding formula established by the 1992 EIA, which accounts for nearly 91% of the state's allocation for K-12 public education.[lii] The BEP is a weighted regression formula used to determine the amount of funding needed in schools, designed to rectify funding shortcomings and inequities that had come under fire in the 1980s when 77 systems sued the state, citing the inequity in school funding. The suit alleged that wealthier systems were able to provide better opportunities to their students while other LEAs struggled just to provide for basic educational services and meet the state's minimum standards. The state Supreme Court ruled that Tennessee's funding formula was the cause for such disparities in public school funding.[liii]

The BEP formula includes a larger local share than the previous one, up from 7.5% to 33%, to allow for major adjustments due to differences in local capacity.[liv] As of 2007, the state rated 50th in per capita in percent of personal income spent on K-12 public education, with the state spending approximately $1.2 billion less than the regional average on preK-12 education, college/universities, and public libraries.[lv] It is important to note that while the state still lags behind many in the domain, the current funding formula represents an improvement over previous years.

The BEP requires the state to pay at least 75% of funds needed for classroom expenditures, including special education, gifted programming, and early childhood education, and 50% of the funds for non-classroom expenditures, such as transportation and facilities. The program established prerequisites for LEAs to receive BEP funds, included class size reductions, made incentive grants available to excelling schools, and included funds for school improvement, technology, and teacher salaries. In some LEAs, teachers have expressed dissatisfaction with the class-size criteria set by the BEP, which at the primary level caps average class size at 20 students, stating that larger classes would require fewer teachers who could then be paid more individually.[lvi] There is no state funding provided for bilingual education; however, given the rapidly increasing proportion of students identified as ELLs, this may be problematic in coming years as more and more students will require language support in order to access and benefit from curriculum and instruction.

Education funding is based on state sales and property taxes, as there is no income tax in Tennessee. Approximately 28% of all school funds come from sales tax and over 36% from property tax. The BEP initially featured a graduated funding structure, which in the 1997 AY reached $1 billion in new funds to LEAs. For the remainder of school funding, county and special LEAs rely on the county school tax set by the county governing board while city school LEAs rely on the city governing board, to whom they can petition for additional funds and increased tax rates.[lvii]

Despite the benefits of the BEP, some systems still face significant financial constraints. A review by the Tennessee Office of Educational Accountability found that the formula is inadequate for the state's urban schools, which serve the state's more diverse students[lviii] and more than a third of all students in the state (see Figure 30).[lix] While an average of 75% of LEA funding comes from the state, it constitutes only 25-40% in the state's four urban LEAs, thereby requiring the LEAs to generate more funds to provide for the basic educational needs of their students. The disparity is underscored by the fact that 22 of that state's 24 underperforming schools are in these four LEAs. This has important implications for students identified as CLD, as the majority attend schools in these LEAs. Faced with a nearly $55 million budget shortfall between 2003 and 2005, Memphis City Schools (MCS) merged schools, cut teachers to the minimum state staffing formula, changed insurance and equipment companies to lower bids, reconfigured information technology operations, and brought out-sourced operations in-house.[lx] Faced with a $16 million deficit in 2005, the LEA also delayed start times in six schools, merged eight schools into four, sought external funding via external grants, froze administrator salaries, and cut 57 positions in central administration, plant operations, and maintenance.

Figure 30: Percentage of TN Students Served in Urban Settings by Group
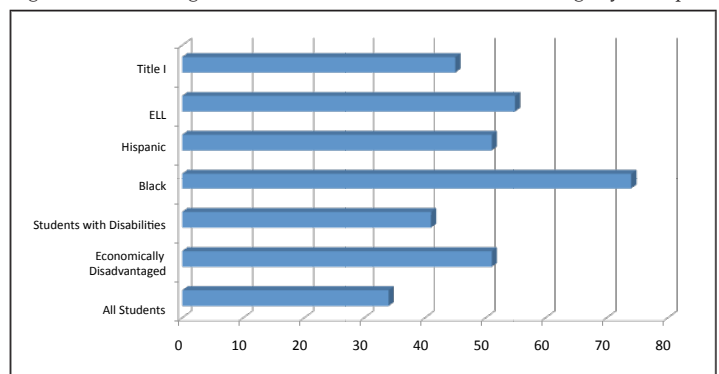
ACCOUNTABILITY

Tennessee began administering statewide assessments in 1989. In addition to reforming Tennessee's school funding formula and the local governance structure, the EIA of 1992 also required local school systems to meet state academic standards and goals through annual, statewide assessments.

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) is the statewide, mandated student assessment program for public school students. TCAP includes the Achievement Test for grades 3 thru 8, and the Competency Test and the Gateway Tests for secondary grades.[lxi] Each spring, students in grades 3 thru 8 take the Achievement Test, a timed, multiple choice test assessing knowledge and skills in reading, language, math, science, and social studies. Schools also have the option of administering a K-2 version of the Achievement Test if they choose.[lxii] The TCAP Writing Assessment is a timed essay exam administered to 5th, 8th, and 11th grade students annually to assess skills in narrative, expository, and persuasive essay writing.[lxiii]

In 1998, the TN State Board of Education selected 10 high school courses in math, science, and language arts for the development of end of course exams. [lxiv] Beginning with students entering high school in the 2001 AY, students were required to pass exams in three core subject areas in order to graduate. Titled the Gateway Tests and administered three times each academic year, these exams were developed with the goal of increasing student performance and establishing accountability for academic outcomes. Scores on the Gateway exams are also used to determine student course grades in specific courses. Additionally, principals receive "value added" data for each teacher on students' achievement, which has shown that struggling students tend to be concentrated with less effective teachers, emphasizing the importance of what happens in classrooms. This approach has become a model for the nation, with Pennsylvania and Ohio mandating its use for all LEAs, and several hundred other LEAs throughout the nation adopting it.[lxv]

Adequate Yearly Progress

The state has received harsh criticism for its model for determining adequate yearly progress (AYP). First, in order for a group to be counted towards a school's AYP, there must be at least 45 students, while AYP for an LEA or school is determined by aggregating scores for all students.[lxvi] Whereas many states average LEA-level results across multiple grades and classify LEAs as missing AYP if they fall short in reading and math for any group, in 2004 Tennessee determined that LEAs would only be categorized as needing improvement if they missed state performance targets in the same subject, for two consecutive years, for the elementary, middle, and high school grade levels. So, during years one and two of failure to make AYP, there is no action taken by the state. It is not until year 4 that parents are notified of the LEA's status and year 5 that administrator performance contracts, supplemental services, school choice options or corrective action are triggered.[lxvii] Student transportation is only provided for students transferring out of Title 1 schools after the fourth year of failure to make AYP. Schools are categorized as "performing" if they then meet AYP in the target area for two consecutive years.[lxviii] In 2005, the state reported 159 schools failed to meet state standards, including 24 that were in their 3rd year of failure and thereby categorized as "underperforming."[lxix]

It has been argued that the state's model violates the spirit of NCLB, but it was approved by the US Department of Education, and in 2005, 18 additional states adopted the model, with 10 more to follow in 2006.[lxx] Critics suggest that this model inflates states' AYP.

Parent Involvement

In part because of the parent involvement requirements of NCLB, a 2004 Tennessee law required LEAs to develop policies to promote family involvement in alignment with the State Board of Education policy delineating basic features of effective initiatives targeting family involvement.[lxxi] From this legislation, the Family Friendly Schools Initiative emerged and LEAs were invited to send teams to a year-long professional development series.

TEACHER LICENSURE & EVALUATION

All Tennessee teachers and administrators are required to obtain a valid state license with endorsement in their area of work, although teachers are permitted to teach one course outside of their endorsements. Under the state's licensure requirements, candidates are required to demonstrate competency related to the liberal arts component of their teacher education programs, as well as in their specific discipline, principles of learning and development, instructional strategies and planning, motivation and engagement, multimedia communication, formal and informal assessment, self-reflection/evaluation, use of technology, and how to adapt their approaches to students from diverse cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, languages, communities, and abilities. Charter school teachers must also hold current state licensure. Teacher licensure is overseen by the Office of Teacher Licensing, which is separate from determination of highly qualified status made by the school LEAs.[lxxii] Professional licenses are valid for 10 years following completion of a 3 year apprentice license.[lxxiii]

The state has a research-based evaluation plan, Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth, in place for all teachers, intended to link the evaluation process to professional development in six areas: planning, instruction, student assessment, student and parent communication, learning environment, and professional growth. Created in 1997, the plan was revised in 2004 to comply with NCLB standards. One limitation of the current plan is that teachers are only required to be evaluated twice under the 10-year license. Non-licensed teachers are evaluated annually. This policy is regarded to have a negative impact on teacher accountability because of the difficulty it poses for firing ineffective teachers, as evaluations are so infrequent.[lxxiv]

RECRUITMENT OF TEACHERS FROM CLD BACKGROUNDS

In 1987, Tennessee identified the shortage of teachers from CLD backgrounds as a concern. The following year, the Tennessee Task Force on the Supply of Minority Teachers issued several recommendations for increasing the number of teachers from diverse backgrounds in Tennessee's schools. Legislation passed in 1993 established progressive goals for the recruitment and retention of teachers identified as Black with the objective of creating a teaching force that reflected the demographic characteristics of the students. The legislation also encouraged individual LEAs to create their own goals; as of 2006, 69
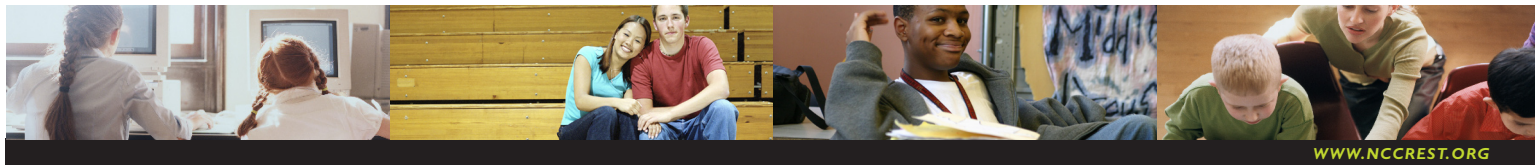
LEAs had done so. Recruitment efforts have included scholarships and grants, workshops, job fairs, web-based recruitment, financial aid dissemination, Troops to Teachers, and mid-career transition programs. Despite the efforts of the Task Force, it was not until the 1999 AY that the proportion of educators identified as Black did not decrease; it stayed constant at 9.9%.[lxxv] By 2004, this figure reached 10.95%, dropping to 10.55% in 2006. However, the proportion of new hires who are identified as Black has been increasing and has risen from approximately 7% in 1991 to 10% in 2004. Low salaries, lack of incentives to recruit eligible job candidates, and difficulty recruiting educators in particular regions were identified as obstacles to increasing the proportion of teachers from CLD backgrounds.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools are authorized under the Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002 to allow for the creation of 50 charters to serve students from schools that failed to make AYP and students who failed to demonstrate proficiency on the math or reading portions of the TCAP or Gateway exams.[lxxvi] Priority is given to students considered at-risk. These eligibility requirements are among the most restrictive of the nation's charter legislation, as many other states allow open enrollment or simply give preference to certain groups.[lxxvii] The stated goals of the Act are to (1) improve learning for all and close the achievement gap, (2) create alternatives for students and parents in high priority schools, (3) foster innovative teaching and learning, (4) allow greater options for teachers, (5) allow options for governance and school improvement.

Charters are independently-operating publicly-funded schools guided by the principles of autonomy and accountability. Under state law, chartering authority is granted to local boards of education, which provide for all per pupil expenditures, while allowing the charter schools "maximum flexibility." Applications are judged according to mission, educational plan, founding group, and operations plan, with particular attention to instructional goals and methods, evaluation and remediation procedures, experiences and qualifications of the sponsor, mission and goals, and budget. Charter schools may apply to lengthen the school year or provide summer school, increase days allowed for parent-teacher conferences or in-services, waive minimum enrollment requirements, and incorporate instructional materials or curriculum not approved by the local board of education. Most of the existing charters feature longer school days and extended school years. In Memphis, many charters have waivers that allow them to create professional development plans for each teacher, provide more planning time in the school day, control decisions on teacher employment, and base teacher evaluations, pay, and promotions on student performance. Charters may be revoked if the school fails to make AYP, fails standards of fiscal management, or violates standards or procedures. By 2008, only one Tennessee charter had been revoked, citing failure to make AYP in Algebra for two years.

As of 2008, there were only 12 charter schools in the state (9 in Memphis and 3 in Nashville), serving less than 1% of all students. Comparisons of test scores show that charter students tend to outperform traditional public school students. Tennessee's charter schools serve students who are predominantly identified as Black and economically disadvantaged (see Figure 31), although the total proportion of Tennessee students served in such settings is quite small. Most schools currently serve between 91 and 667 students, with an average enrollment of 233 students and an average class size of 15 to 20 students

DISCIPLINE

In 1994, the State Board of Education passed Public Charter 268 (Zero Tolerance), which required students found to possess weapons or controlled substances or who assault school employees to be expelled for at least one year. LEAs are also permitted to include other offenses in their policies, and

Figure 31: Percentage of Charter Enrollment by Group
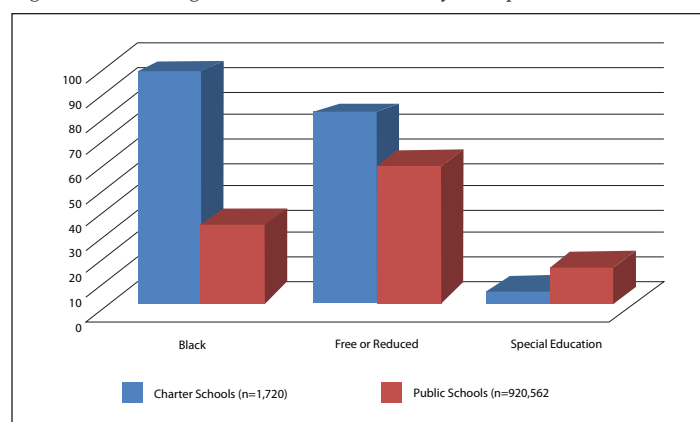
as a result, have included infractions such as threats, theft, sexual harassment, and "accumulation of misbehavior." In 2000, Public Charter 634 gave the superintendent authority to modify expulsions on an individual basis. In an estimated 25% of zero tolerance cases actions other than the one-year expulsion are taken. These include permanent expulsion, suspension, rehabilitation, detention, paddling, evening or adult high schools, and remanding to the juvenile courts. In 2006, the Tennessee Office of Research and Education Accountability recommended that LEAs consider alternatives to expulsion, citing its links to repeat offenses and school dropout.[lxxviii]

In 1984, the State Board authorized the creation of alternative schools for students with disciplinary problems.[lxxix] Within the first year, more than 50 schools were created, and in the second year, legislation was amended to require each LEA to provide such settings for students who had been suspended or expelled in an effort to remove disruptive students from the general education learning environment. The EIA required LEAs to have at least one alternative school for secondary students, while also requiring that students must attend traditional high schools for at least part of the time in order to graduate. Alternative schools were defined as "short-term interventions" for students with disciplinary problems, and under State Board standards, students could be remanded to such settings for suspension, expulsion, zero-tolerance violations, chronic misbehavior, or "inability to perform" in school. Across LEAs, the average time spent in such schools ranges from two to four weeks, though a quarter of programs include extensions as a disciplinary consequence.

In 2005, a review by the state's Office of Educational Accountability found that the staffing, curriculum, and support services in many of these schools were lacking.[lxxx] The variation in the quality of programs from LEA to LEA was attributed to a number of factors, including (1) lack of enforceable guidance in the state mandate, (2) differences in local funding and lack of adequate funding in half of alternative schools, (3) lack of accountability systems, and (4) dearth of counseling, psychological, and other support services for students. The criteria for sending students to these programs varied widely among LEAs, and there was substantial deviation from behavior management standards. What's more, in many schools the academic needs of incoming students were never assessed, and many teachers lacked qualification for working with students in multiple subjects and grade levels, which was common practice.

Students in 9th grade were most likely to be placed in the alternative schools. In many LEAs, students identified as Black, economically disadvantaged, or with disabilities are overrepresented in these settings. In some LEAs, students identified as Black were more than 10 times as likely to be placed in alternative schools as their White peers, and students identified with disabilities were more than 6 times as likely to be placed. Given the issues of educational quality that have been raised about alternative schools, the overrepresentation of students identified as CLD and disabled in these settings is a cause for concern.

SUMMARY

Tennessee's educational system is organized such that local control, accountability, and a corporate model of leadership are emphasized. Following statewide attention to funding disparities, the BEP was established to allocate state funds for K-12 education. Despite representing a substantial improvement over past funding formulas, there continue to be disparities in the proportion of school funding coming from the state among school systems, with urban systems at a particular disadvantage. For students identified as CLD, this is especially problematic, given that the majority attend the state's urban LEAs. Faced with substantial budget shortfalls, MCS in particular, which serves a student body that is more than 85% Black, has been forced to merge schools, cut teachers, freeze salaries, and shorten school days in some schools. The potential implications of such policies on students' opportunities to learn are concerning. Furthermore, state policy on Zero Tolerance and alternative schools disproportionately affect students identified as CLD and those with disabilities, as these students are more likely to be removed via suspension or expulsion and be placed in alternative schools, where numerous concerns about educational quality have emerged.

The state has received criticism for its model of AYP given its very narrow inclusionary criteria for failure to meet state standards relative to other states. Critics have suggested that the model inflates state performance. Meanwhile, state requirements for sanctions and interventions provide students with few alternatives until schools have been deemed underperforming for at least 4 years. Also concerning are the implications of state licensing and teacher evaluation policy for teacher quality and instruction. When evidence that students who are CLD have less access to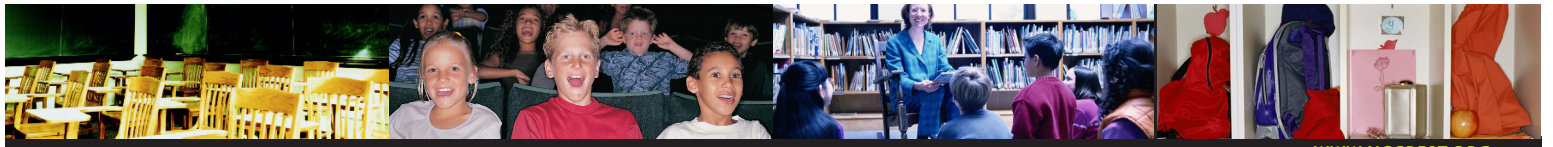 experienced, effective teachers is combined with policy that provides little options for teacher accountability, this calls into question the state's fulfillment of their responsibility to ensure students have access to high quality educators. Together, the implications of these aspects of policy for the state's responsibility to learners and their families are troubling.
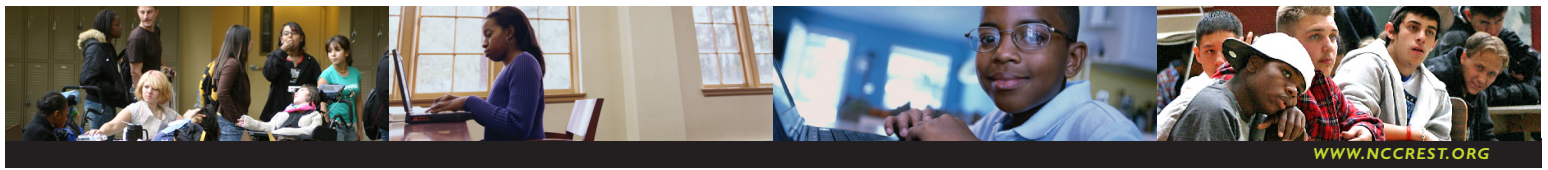
PRACTICES

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.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Tennessee's state level professional development focuses on accountability, systems thinking, and constructivism. The Office of Professional Development measures the degree to which student outcomes are improved following professional development and looks to increase product-oriented experiences and opportunities for reflection, practice, and follow-up. In striving to adopt a system-wide approach to professional development, administrators, teachers and board members are encouraged to attend professional development activities together. There is also an emphasis on local options, action research, experiential learning, and focus groups to foster learners' co-construction of knowledge.

In Memphis City Schools in particular, professional development is treated as continuous experiences embedded within daily practice in schools and LEA offices. School administrators engage in ongoing evaluation of staff and allow teachers to take on leadership roles within schools. Learning from peers, as opposed to relying on experts, is emphasized. In order to foster transfer to practice and application of new knowledge and skills, professional development trainings are organized as multi-session events with follow-up. The LEA also participated in the national Teacher Leader Academy, training 17 teachers to act as instructional models within their schools and design data-based professional development courses.[lxxxi]

DISCIPLINE

In 1994, the TDOE created the Tennessee School Safety Center to provide schools with assistance in creating safety plans via models, training materials, and guidelines. A primary activity of the Center has been to disseminate research information on school safety, prevention, and intervention.[lxxxii] The Center also provides training and technical assistance to schools and LEAs around emergency preparedness, campus security, school climate, behavioral support, and policies and procedures. Behavior support trainings are available for substance-abuse prevention, bullying prevention, and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS).[lxxxiii]

The Tennessee Character Education Partnership was established in 2000 to develop a network of model programs with the goal of developing standards of behavior that reflect community values. The state devised a competitive grant process through which LEAs can apply for funding to develop character education activities and provide training and technical assistance targeted at improving school climate and student achievement. The partnership maintains standards and guidelines for character education,

> Policy and professional learning must be translated into practice in ways that lead to systemic change at all levels of the educational system.

disseminates best practices, develops evaluation tools for tracking progress, and organizes the annual Character Education Symposiums for educators from throughout the state.[lxxxiv]

In 2005, the state's largest school system, MCS, adopted a school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports as a framework for the LEA's new discipline approach, the Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan (BRBP), citing reliance on a reactionary approaches, including corporal punishment as ineffective. For instance, in 2003, there were nearly 30,000 incidences of corporal punishment in MCS. Under this new approach, each school was required to develop a discipline plan to meet the needs of their students and physical punishment was barred. A team of teachers and administrators from every school, totaling more than 1,600 participants, attended a summer training to learn about the general model and best practices so that they could then disseminated the information throughout their individual schools. The launch of the program also included a parent summit, town hall meetings, and a radio tour by the superintendent. Within schools, student support teams were established and professional development courses were offered. Additionally, within high priority schools (those failing to meet AYP) prevention specialists and behavior specialists were provided by the LEA. Following the implementation of BRBP, there was a reduction in some behavioral infractions, such as misconduct, fighting, firearms, and dress code violations. However, ditching, insubordination, violent incidents, gang-related behaviors, and threats or battery of staff increased, as well as expulsions. Administrators note that the increase in violent activities mirrors the increase in the city at large, which was second in the nation for violent crimes.[lxxxv]

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

The State Department recently partnered with Vanderbilt University's IRIS Center to develop online Response to Intervention (RTI) training modules to guide SLD identification practices. The modules are available to LEAs throughout the state. TDOE staff also received training to provide technical assistance to LEAs around RTI. In addition, SIG consultants provided professional development on tiered literacy instruction to schools participating in Reading First, focusing on differentiated instruction, best practices, and RTI implementation. There is also an RTI Oversight Committee that is collaborating with a TDOE task force to revise procedures for disability identification.[lxxxvi]

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The TDOE established the Smart from the Start program to promote understanding of early development and the importance of experiences that promote learning in infants and toddlers. In 2006, $30 million in lottery funding was added to fund the establishment of 377 preschool classrooms throughout the state. An Early Childhood Collaboration Task Force was formed to address inclusion, LRE, and collaboration in early childhood education settings. The task force includes members of the TDOE, Department of Human Services, Head Start, local LEAs, Community Child Care, and a parent representative.
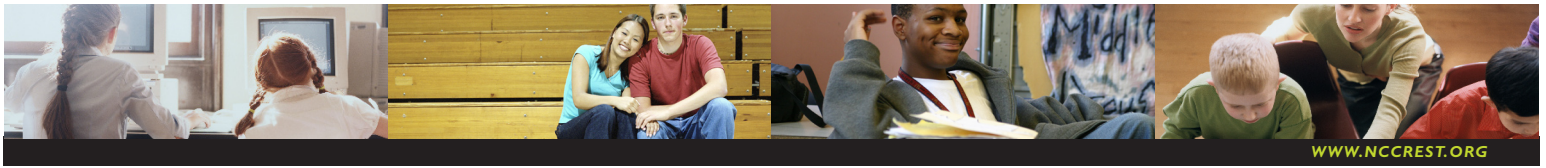
FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS

In 1993, LEAs were granted authority to establish Family Resource Centers (FRC) to network prevention and intervention programs from the fields of education, medicine, mental health, business, and social services.[lxxxvii] The FRC guidelines emphasize the importance of early intervention, prevention, building parent capacity, and establishing school partnerships with community and state agencies. Cooperation and coordination among stakeholders are also highlighted.

There are currently over 104 centers established in 79 LEAs in 65 counties. There are 10 FRCs in Memphis, 7 in Nashville, and 3 in Chattanooga which serve many of the state's urban students. The centers are led by advisory boards composed of at least 50% parents and a full-time director. The State awards grants of $33,300 to support the centers with a minimum local match of $16,700.

The goal of the FRC program is to establish partnerships with parents, community leaders, local businesses, states and local service agencies, and public and private organizations based on the needs of the particular community in which the center is based. As such, each center establishes its own goals, implementation strategies, and standards of effectiveness. Services offered include life skills programs, preschool programs, parent trainings, job skills trainings, and individualized services for specific problems.

In rural communities, FRCs often serve the entire county, while urban FRCs target specific communities considered to have high populations of "at-risk" families. Most FRCs operate out of schools, while others are located in adult education centers, LEA offices, or housing developments. Because of differences in location, programs offered, and goals, individual FRCs serve between 50 and 1,000 clients each.

URBAN EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE

In 2003, the Urban Education Improvement Program was established to create partnerships with teachers, administrators and stakeholders committed to improving student achievement in urban schools. Among the program's goals are implementing research-based practices for urban students, locating resources, and focusing on school improvement. The program organizes the Urban Summit, which brings urban schools together to share strategies for addressing underachievement, classroom management, data-based decision making, and culturally responsive educational environments.

LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

The state's Special Education Manual, most recently revised in 2008, provides guidance to educators.[lxxxviii] The manual advises educators to explore other options before considering special education referral, including consulting with colleagues and modifying the curriculum, and recommends that schools establish problem-solving teams. The language of Tennessee's special education rules parallels that of IDEA regarding the principle of LRE. Within the TDOE Special Education Manual, it is recommended that students be educated within their home schools whenever possible.

In their most recent Annual Performance Report (APR), Tennessee notes that more than 63% of students are served within the regular education class more than 80% of the day, attributing increases in such placements to increased accuracy in reporting brought on by the use of IEP writing software in 122 of the state's school LEAs. The state also attributed the improvement to a number of initiatives throughout the state. The Closing the Achievement Gap initiative encourages the creation of inclusive, integrated educational systems, a qualified, stable teaching force for all students, and improved use of data and technical assistance to increase practical applications of research. Focused technical assistance is linked to the What's a Good LEA initiative, which emphasizes alignment of instruction, curriculum, and assessment, co-teaching and collaboration between general and special education teachers, use of formative assessment, and attention to the instruction and performance of students identified as economically disadvantaged. Other initiatives noted in the 2008 APR include:

- Gateway Institutes
- Differentiated Instruction
- Student Accommodations and Modifications Workshops
- DIBELS Training
- Reading First Initiative In-service
- SIG Institute
- Voluntary Pre-K Implementation Workshops
- Positive Behavior Support Grants
- Academic Vocabulary Project
- After-School Initiatives
- Intervention Teams Working with Targeted Schools
- The TN-AT Initiative

The state awards contracts to LEAs to be model demonstration sites for inclusive practices. In 2006, seven sites were identified, compared to nine the previous year. In addition, the state funds two agencies which provide professional learning opportunities in topics related to fostering LRE. The state also offered contracts to LEAs who failed to make AYP for the special education subgroup to support the use of scientifically-based practices in the education of students identified with disabilities. Of the 80 LEAs failing to make AYP during the 2006 academic year, 48 applied for and were awarded the grants.

EdExcellence

Beginning in 1986, the TDOE has funded Partnerships for EdExcellence, formerly LRE for Life, a professional development project operated out of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville with the goal of bridging the gap between research and practice. The agency provides research-based in-services, workshops, and conference presentations on inclusive practices, self-management, student motivation, differentiated instruction, the IEP process, school-wide PBIS, work-based learning, transition planning, special education management, collaboration, literacy, and severe disabilities.[lxxxix] The agency provided three two-day trainings on transition services and three workshops on inclusive practices, as well as workshops on positive behavior supports and classroom management for teachers and administrators.

RISE

Since 1999, the RISE Project has also been funded through the TDOE to promote inclusive education. The agency provides technical assistance to LEAs and schools to implement and monitor evidence-based practices that promote placement in the LRE. Specific content areas of the project's in-services are co-teaching, differentiated instruction, DIBELS, RTI, high-stakes testing, and transition planning. There are also workshops on co-teaching and school-wide PBIS. In 2006, the agency provided training to 46 schools under two separate grants in 36 separate events.

DISPROPORTIONALITY

NCCRESt State Partner Activities

Tennessee became an NCCRESt State Partner in 2004 in a proactive effort to address the issue of disproportionality within the state's public schools following IDEA's 1997 amendments that required the collection and analysis of state data pertaining to disproportionality.[xc] Through the partnership, the Center made available our frameworks, materials, and data to guide the state as the collaborative team evaluated the status of culturally responsive educational systems in Tennessee. The Center also provided guidance for the development and modification of data collection and evaluation procedures. In addition, members of Tennessee's Disproportionality Core Work Group participated in the Center's quarterly meetings along with the other state partners. In 2006, the state established a stakeholders' committee to guide the goals of the Work Group.

The Center has provided technical assistance to the Department of Education on a variety of topics related to culturally responsive education and minority disproportionality in special education via resource materials, phone support, on-site meetings, and participation in the NCCRESt National Forums. Particular assistance was provided in the areas of data analysis, aligning multiple initiatives, and providing technical assistance to LEAs.[xci] In 2006, project director Elizabeth Kozleski presented at the statewide professional learning and special education conferences on fostering and supporting contexts for professional learning around culturally responsive education, as well as frameworks for understanding disproportionality.[xcii] In 2007, staff from the Tennessee Department of Education participated in professional learning regarding the LEA rubric, led by Shelley Zion.[xciii] Further, through its companion project, NIUSI, Memphis City Schools has participated in quarterly professional learning events, and a core leadership team has worked with NIUSI on reducing disproportionality and increasing access to the general education environment.

State Activities Addressing Disproportionality

Following a review of 1999 special education data that showed increasing disproportionality in Tennessee's special education programs, a focused task force group was formed to review and revise policies and procedures relevant to the identification of students as disabled. The Core Work Group reviews and reports disproportionality data as part of the state's APR. Despite limited resource, staff, and time, the Core Disproportionality Work Group has been dedicated to meeting the requirements of IDEA and OSEP through technical assistance to the state's LEAs.

Statue criteria have been adjusted to align with federal requirements as a result of clarifications and responses from OSEP and to identify all LEAs with potential disproportionality so that they may receive the necessary technical assistance. For the 2006 and 2007 academic year, in order to be considered significantly disproportionate, a LEA needed at least 50 students enrolled in a given target group, at least 10 students in the disability child count as of December 1, and a relative risk ratio greater than or equal to 3 in the target category.[xciv] Previously, values of 2 or 2.5 were used as the cutoff for possible overrepresentation utilizing three year trend data for each LEA based on recommendations within the NCCRESt Disproportionality Rubric. Based on TN's criteria for overrepresentation, LEAs with risk ratios greater than 3 were required to allot 15% of their IDEA Part B funds for early intervening services. Following a letter of determination from OSEP, Tennessee changed their analysis. At this point, it was based only on annual data and examination of underrepresentation was required. Relative risk ratios are used exclusively, rather than weighted risk ratios, in order to determine disproportionality based on the LEA's unique student population.

> Disproportionality is not only an issue of the special education system, but of the educational system at large. Improving instruction and supports within general education can reduce the number of students who are identified as CLD and as having disabilities.

Underrepresentation is calculated for LEAs with weighted and relative risk ratios less than 0.25 where there are at least 45 students identified in the target category and where the target group equals at least 5% of enrollment. All LEAs that meet the criteria for disproportionality are targeted for focused monitoring by the state's Division of Special Education and must conduct a review of policies, procedures, and practices to determine if the observed disproportionality is the result of inappropriate identification. LEAs are to be notified annually of their status, including the levels of disproportionality in the targeted disability categories and the required actions to be taken (see Table 2).

The state has utilized a modified version of the NCCRESt Rubric for looking at district practices, Preventing Disproportionality by Strengthening District Policies and Procedures: An Assessment and Strategic Planning Process for LEAs to use as a self-assessment after they have been determined to have significant disproportionality due to inappropriate identification.[xcv] The original document is intended to aid state departments and LEAs in identifying and addressing institutional and systemic issues impacting students identified as CLD by providing a self-study tool for examining policies, practices, and procedures in general and special education that contribute to disproportionality. The four standards addressed within the tool include the core functions of educational systems, instructional services, individualized education, and accountability, which together include 23 focus areas.
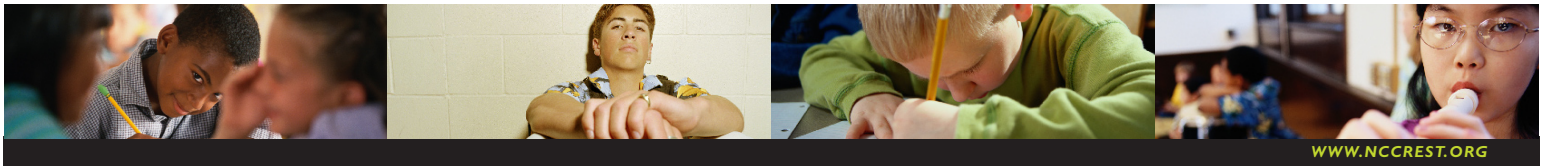
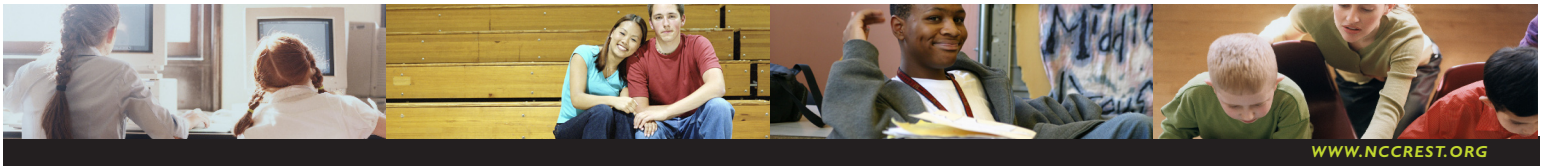| TABLE 2: CATEGORIZATION AND REQUIRED ACTIONS BY OBTAINED RELATIVE RISK RATIO UNDER TENNESSEE DEFINITIONS		
TENNESSE AVERAGE	**RANKING**	**NATIONAL AVERAGE**
0-0.25	Disproportionate Underrepresentation	• LEA must review policies, procedures, and practices using an abbreviated version of the NCCRESt LEA Rubric • If inappropriate identification is found, LEAs must develop a Disproportionality Plan of Improvement • State provides TA at LEA request
0.26-1.99	No identified disproportionality	None
2.00-2.99	Potential disproportionality	• State recommends that LEA review policies and procedures, and conduct local analysis of identification procedures • State provides TA at LEA request
≥3.00	Disproportionate overrepresentation (Significant disproportionality)	• LEA must reserve 15% of special education funds for early intervening services until relative risk ratio is below state target • LEA must review policies, procedures, and practices using an abbreviated version of the NCCRESt LEA Rubric • LEA must publicly report on revisions of policies, procedures, and practices • If inappropriate identification is found, LEAs must develop a Disproportionality Plan of Improvement

Tennessee has adapted NCCRESt's Rubric for LEA use in review policies, practices, and procedures related to inappropriate identification, and includes only 6 selected focus areas from instructional services and individualized education. These focus areas were viewed by the State as the most closely linked to identification procedures, policies, and practices which are required to be addressed in the APR under Indicators 9 and 10. LEAs are encouraged to utilize the full rubric to evaluate district practices that may contribute to disproportionality. LEAs complete the rubric and it is then evaluated and rated by a panel of DOE staff to be Exemplary, Adequate, Partial, or Inadequate. Exemplary ratings indicate that the LEAs have provided evidence of exemplary practices, policies, and procedures, demonstrating that the observed disproportionality is not due to inappropriate identification. Additionally, the LEA must provide a specific improvement plan for reducing disproportionate representation. LEAs that do not receive Exemplary ratings must submit Disproportionality Plans of Improvement, which include action plans for addressing the state's recommendations for improvement, timelines, and descriptions of necessary personnel, funding, and materials needed to implement the plan. The DOE then determines what technical assistance and focused monitoring may be warranted for individual LEAs. In the 2008 APR, only two LEAs were identified as having disproportionate representation in special education under these criteria (i.e., as a result of inappropriate identification) for the 2005 academic year; 4 LEAs were identified in the 2006 academic year.

Changes in the APR process have resulted over time under the scrutiny by OSEP and DPI's understanding of the requirements of the law. This iterative process of clarifying and strengthening analysis makes comparisons between years difficult but ensures that the state's definitions and criteria are in compliance with OSEP. For instance, under the 2007 APR, significant disproportionality within ID was defined by a weighted risk ratio greater than 2.0, LEA enrollment of Black students greater than 200, identification of at least 20 Black students as ID, identification of at least 3% of Black students as ID, three-years of increasing risk ratios, and a "total disparity" (the sum of the differences between the risk ratio for Black students subtracted from the risk ratios for White students and Hispanic students).[xcvi] At the time, 54 LEAs were targeted for monitoring due to significant disproportionality according to the risk ratio criteria alone in a review of system data of all 139 LEAs in the state. Four of these LEAs were required to use 15% of IDEA funds for early intervening services because they met all of the five criteria for significant disproportionality mentioned above. These had risk ratios ranging from 4.38 to 5.19, which represented increases over previous years. In 2008, using current criteria, 20 LEAs were identified as having disproportionate representation (over- and underrepresentation) in ID, as well as 23 LEAs in ED, 12 in SLD, and 9 in SLI, as well as 8 for disproportionate representation in autism and 18 in other health impairments. For all categories, this represented an increase over the previous year. However, it is important to note that because of time constraints, TDOE was not able to determine what underrepresentation was due to inappropriate identification.

Beginning the 2008 school year, a new self-assessment, the Tennessee Rubric Evaluation of policies, practices, and procedures (TnREpp) will be used where significant disproportionality is found. This new tool has been aligned with the Tennessee Comprehensive School Performance Plan (TCSPP), which each LEA will be required to develop and maintain, including goals and activities that are to be updated annually. LEAs obtaining ratings less than Adequate on the TnREpp will be required to write a Disproportionality Plan of Improvement that will be included in the LEA's TCSPP.

SUMMARY

There are a number of encouraging practices in place. The state is increasingly moving towards models of school safety and discipline that are geared toward improving school climate and promoting best practices in behavior support. The state is also promoting the use of RTI in literacy instruction and the identification of learning disabilities. Inclusive practices are promoted through state-funded professional development and technical assistance agencies. Early childhood education programs are continually being expanded and Family Resource Centers have the potential to link families and communities to a variety of resources throughout the state and from a range of disciplines including social services, mental health, and medicine. The amount of effort that TN has put into understanding and learning about how to develop an appropriate bar for determining disproportionality is only the beginning of the process for addressing the deep and far-reaching consequences of inequity in education.
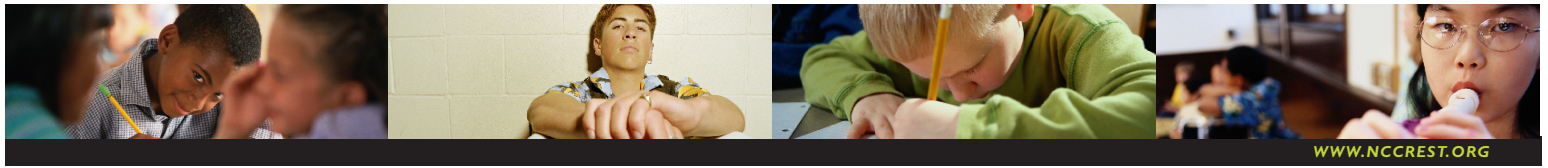
The state has established much more stringent criteria for determining the presence of disproportionality in special education based on feedback and directives from OSEP. The relative ratio cutoff has changed each year and makes analysis of improvement in disproportionality difficult to discern from the current data. The risk ratio cut off of 3 results in high levels of disproportionality in many LEAs. Setting the cutoff at 3 or higher is prevalent across states, and raises concern about the degree to which LEAs are being pressured to explore and address disproportionality when they fall below the state cutoff.

Additionally, while we certainly encourage the use of the NCCRESt District Rubric in evaluating LEA policies, procedures, and practices, the use of such a limited portion of the tool for determining the appropriateness of LEA practices is somewhat concerning as it is unlikely that such an abbreviated version can adequately capture the institutional and systemic issues impacting students identified as CLD in a given LEA. There continues to be a lack of clarity across states about the relationship of disproportionality to education policies, practices, and procedures that create the context within general education for a pipeline to special education that results in over- and under-identification as well as in the placements in the LRE and in discipline.[xcvii] States need to be concerned about asking LEAs to look at setting and the precipitating policies and practices that result in under- and overrepresentation and that create challenges for multidisciplinary teams making special education decisions at the local building level. Disproportionality cannot be adequately addressed by only altering a specific process that determines who is eligible to enter special education. A variety of studies have demonstrated that students are often referred to special education for reasons that have to do with teacher quality, curricular adequacy, opportunities to learn, and the social and cultural expectations of buildings. LEAs will continue to focus their attention for improving disproportionality on the identification process and thereby avoid the issues in general education that are significant contributors to this longstanding issue.
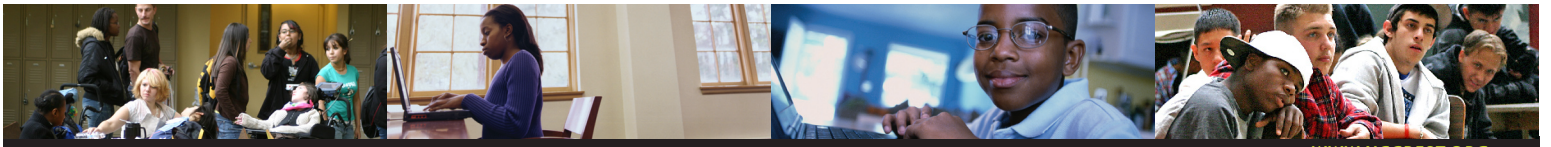
SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding disproportionality requires examining the intersections of culture, learning, disability, and socio-historical context in education. Disproportionality is not only an issue of the special education system, but of the educational system at large. NCCRESt holds that improving instruction and supports within general education can reduce the number of students who are identified as CLD and as having disabilities. The aim is not to "fix" the supposed deficits of students who are identified CLD, but rather to create 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. Educators must evaluate their assumptions, practices, and relationships within school systems and the community in working towards systemic reform.[xcviii]

One important aspect of understanding educational systems is viewing them as embedded within a broader social context. In examining education in Tennessee, we first sought to understand the demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural-historical milieu of the state. The state's history is wrought by racial oppression and discord. Now home to over 6 million people, nearly 20% of whom are CLD, Tennessee is characterized by geographic segregation and startling disparities. The majority of individuals identified as CLD live in a few highly concentrated urban areas, settlement patterns that can be linked back to the era of slavery. Individuals identified as CLD earn less than their White peers at all educational levels, and are more likely to live in poverty, be unemployed, and be uninsured. Among the state's children, more than one in five lives in poverty. Some questions to consider as educators engage with these issues:

- How does socio-cultural context inform educators understanding of students' needs?
- Given pervasive inequity in the domains outside of education, how does the educational system conceptualize its responsibility to children and families disadvantaged by institutional and systemic factors outside of school?
- How can coordinated partnerships between multiple systems (e.g. education, mental health, social services, economic, etc.) contribute to comprehensive systemic change?

Within schools, more than 30% of students are identified as CLD, with students identified as Black representing a quarter of all enrollment statewide. More than 15% of Tennessee students are identified as disabled, and while overall special education data show that students identified as CLD are underrepresented at the state-level, analyses by disability category and district show that students identified as Black are nearly 3 times as likely to be labeled ID and are overrepresented in each of the high-incidence disability

categories in many districts. What's more, while students identified as CLD are equally represented in the least restrictive environment compared to students identified as White, they are also much more likely to be placed in the most restrictive settings. Students identified as CLD and those identified as disabled consistently perform less well than their peers on statewide assessments, and are less likely to enroll in AP courses, be identified for gifted/talented programs, or graduate high school. What's more, students identified as Black and students with disabilities are disproportionately subjected to disciplinary consequences, including suspension, expulsion, and placement in alternative schools.

Recent policy changes have emphasized local control, accountability, and state funding of education. Unfortunately, urban school systems continue to be disadvantaged by funding formulas and respond to budget shortfalls in ways that potentially limit students' opportunities to learn, such as reducing school hours and increasing class size. Despite state efforts to recruit teachers from diverse backgrounds, the vast majority of Tennessee educators are identified as White. While many have a master's degree or higher, students identified as CLD have less access to experienced, effective teachers. State policy allows few opportunities for teacher evaluation and provides LEAs with limited ability to remove ineffective educators. Tennessee's model of AYP is also problematic because it potentially inflates schools' performance, thereby reducing the state's responsibility to students and families in poorly performing schools. The state must consider what this model means for children and families. In doing so, policymakers should consider the following:

> 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.

- How does it benefit or disadvantage students in particular LEAs, schools or communities?
- What effects might the current model have on opportunities to learn and educational options?
- How can the model be restructured to promote the optimization of students' achievement?

The state's criteria for determining significant disproportionality is also concerning, as is the restricted nature of the definition that excludes much of the disparity in special education identification and positions what many would consider high-levels of inequity as acceptable. This issue is certainly one that many states face. Tennessee has a long history of overrepresentation of students identified as Black among those identified as ID, and while concerted efforts have been made to address disproportionality, more work is needed. Additionally, while we certainly encourage the use of the NCCRESt District Rubric in evaluating LEA policies, procedures, and practices, the state's use

of such a limited portion of the tool for determining the appropriateness of LEA practices is somewhat problematic as it is unlikely that such an abbreviated version can adequately capture the institutional and systemic issues impacting students identified as CLD in a given LEA.

Tennessee has made notable efforts to improve outcomes for students. The state's Education Improvement Act helped reduce inequities in school funding and increased accountability for student outcomes. Unfortunately, continued discrepancies in funding, particularly for urban schools which serve the majority of the state's diverse students, and a persistent achievement gap between students identified as CLD and their peers underscore the need for continued reform. The state has created a charter school system that provides meaningful opportunities for students who were previously unsuccessful in traditional public schools, but few students currently benefit from this option. Some school systems are now adopting positive, proactive discipline approaches such as character education and school-wide positive behavior support, but the state's policy of Zero Tolerance and its system of alternative schools, many of which are of questionable quality, continue to disproportionately affect students identified as CLD and those with disabilities. Faced with increasing populations of students identified as CLD, including large proportions of students identified as Black, the state has made several commendable efforts to recruit teachers from diverse backgrounds, though their numbers remain low. The state's professional development system focuses on accountability, systems thinking, and constructivism. Tennessee's system of Family Resource Centers provides a critical network linking families and communities to resources in a variety of domains. While each of these initiatives is commendable, there is still work to be done to achieve equity and promote cultural responsiveness. Educators must consider how such efforts can be restructured so that they truly benefit all students. Policymakers and educators should consider the following questions as they continue their work:

- How do states, LEAs, and schools learn about the changing needs of the students and families they serve?
- To what extent are systems designed to critically evaluate educational policy and practice?
- How can current initiatives, such as FRCs, and other efforts be expanded to help ensure universal access to early intervening services?
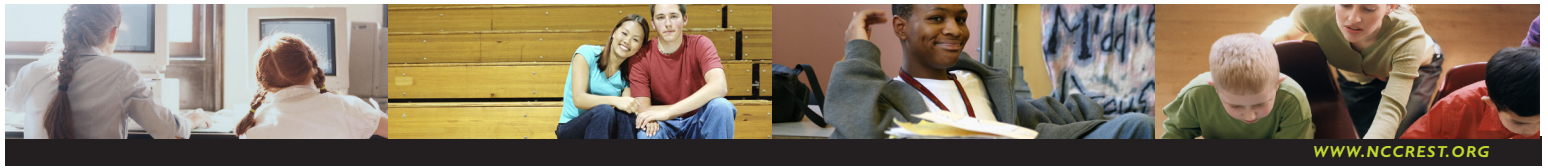
Taking into consideration the contextual factors of the state, data on general and special education outcomes, the current policy landscape, and ongoing professional practices, we recommend some specific areas of improvement in moving towards the development of culturally responsive educational systems:

1. Addressing Disproportionality – All LEA improvement plans submitted to the state should be inclusive of their work to address disproportionality. The disproportionate representation of students identified as CLD in special education is not just a special education issue. It must be understood as a product of education as a cultural practice and inequity in the system at large, not only as an issue of special education identification. The State's new requirements for the Comprehensive School Performance Plans hold great promise for creating important inquiry at the local level surrounding the complex issue of disproportionality.

2. Strategic Planning – The state must have a long-term plan for redressing continued disproportionality in special education. Necessary changes to policy and practice must be explored. What's more, state definitions of significant disproportionality must be reexamined as these guide much of the disproportionality work. While the state context is complex, setting transparent goals for the future is an important aspect of transforming current realities. We acknowledge the varying viewpoints on this perspective. We suggest that the state develop and publish a long-term plan for addressing continued disproportionality. What's more, state definitions of disproportionality must be tightened as LEAs engage these issues with greater levels of understanding and improvement in strategies for eliminating disproportionality. The state should engage in continuous and iterative improvements in its policies, procedures and practices in order to eliminate disproportionality. It is critical to laud the state for its progress in addressing disproportionality but state level planning is needed to sustain efforts and bring them to scale throughout the state.

3. Comprehensive Change – The state must examine inequity in other systems as they relate and contribute to inequitable educational outcomes and disproportionality in special education. Because educational systems exist within a broader context, it is unlikely that true parity can be achieved in education if the disparities in other institutions go unaddressed. Comprehensive systemic change will require coordinated efforts between multiple systems, including health care, social services, mental health, education, and other branches of government.

4. Professional Learning – Professional learning must include content around cultural responsiveness. How is professional learning promoting education for all through evidence-based instruction, curriculum, and intervention? There must also be a thoughtful discourse around teacher preparation and licensure programs regarding the knowledge, skills, and capacities of educators to ensure that practitioners are equipped to produce positive results for students identified as CLD.

5. Universal Prevention – The state should examine how powerful universal access to early intervening services can be provided for all students. Such efforts are necessary for ensuring all children have high quality opportunities to learn in order to address the gaps in educational outcomes.

Creating equitable, culturally responsive systems is a high-stakes task. If done well, the state will increase it intellectual capital, create the possibility of expanding its economic base, and increase the quality of life for its citizens. Tennessee has initiatives in place that can be built upon to promote such systems. Raising awareness, addressing difficult issues, and engaging in ongoing reflection and evaluation of policy and practice are critical. Policy and professional learning must be translated into practice in ways that lead to systemic change at all levels of the educational system. Only through persistent, coordinated effort can systemic change that supports the learning of all students be achieved.

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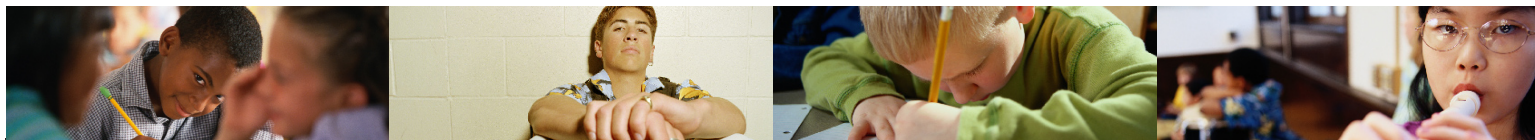Tennessee Department of Education 2007 Report Card
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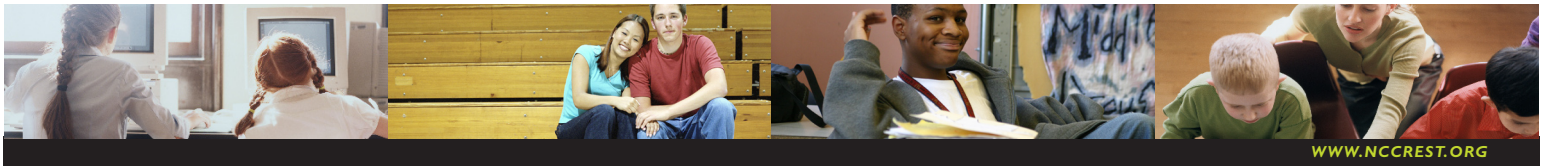
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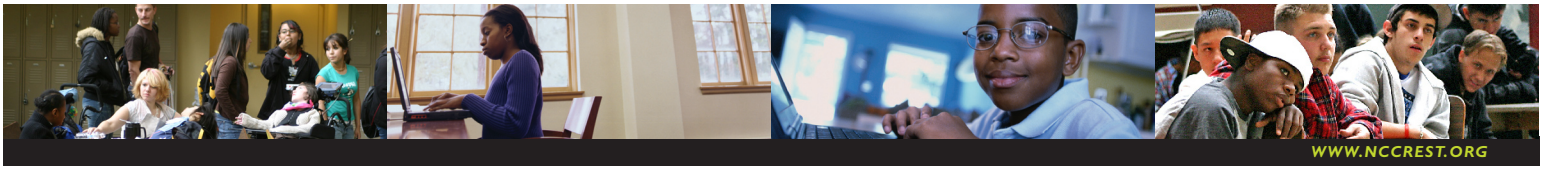
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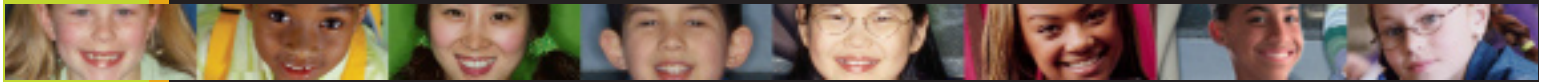
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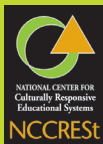
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