

Handout 5 Action Steps for Parent Leadership Groups and Community Organizations

Disproportionality in special education based on race or ethnicity is of obvious concern to anyone who cares about education. We are all stakeholders in what our children learn, how they are treated at school, and what they achieve now and in the future. Yet, far too often, children with disabilities experience different treatment in school and achieve disproportionately lower outcomes. This is especially for those from racial or ethnic minority groups.



What can stakeholders in the community do to help address, reduce, and (best case!) eliminate this decades-old problem? Here are numerous suggestions and possible action steps that stakeholders can take.

Take Action about Disproportionality in Special Education: For Parents, Parent Leadership Groups, and Community Organizations

To be prepared to participate *meaningfully* in how your state, district, and school address disproportionality, you must first be well informed about the special education process. The Parent Center serving your area is an EXCELLENT source of information to consult. Parent Centers are funded by the U.S. Department of Education to provide support and training to parents of children with disabilities. They offer in-person and online workshops, webinars, newsletters, one-on-one support, and much more.

Find your Parent Center at:

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/>

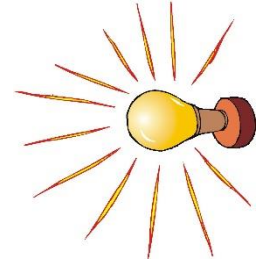
After you have the basics of special education under your belt, try the suggestions below as stepping stones to becoming involved in addressing disproportionality in your state.

- **Become informed about disproportionality in general.** For a crash-course intro to the subject, read *5 Things to Know about Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Special Education*, on line at: <https://www.childtrends.org/child-trends-5/5-things-know-racial-ethnic-disparities-special-education/>



Another good opening read (longer, more in-depth) is *Truth in Labeling: Disproportionality in Special Education*, from the National Education Association. In addition to describing the basics, the guide offers recommendations on addressing disproportionality at the classroom, school, and community levels. <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/truthlabeling.pdf>

- Learn about disproportionality issues in your area.** Is disproportionality going on in your school, community, district, state? Find out what your school system's policies and practices are for preventing, detecting, and addressing disproportionality. Does the school system monitor its data to identify disproportionality that involves students with disabilities from specific racial or ethnic minority groups? Has your school system or state ever been identified as having a significant amount of disproportionality in special education? These questions must be individually answered. It's difficult to suggest resources of where to identify such specific information, save perhaps your state/local Parent Center or the reporting to the public that your state department of education is required to do.



- Become active in committees and advisory councils in special education.** There are many advisory groups and school committees with which parents, parent leadership groups, and community organizations can become involved, locally and in the state. Examples include the PTO or PTA (parent-teacher associations), PACs (Parent Advisory Committees), CACs (Citizens Advisory Councils), and disability-specific groups (such as local or state chapters of national-level organizations that specialize in a specific disability such as learning disabilities or autism).

The **Parent Center** serving your area is likely to have a list they can share with you. Attend school board meetings. Attend public meetings that deal with disproportionality, special education, or the interests of minority groups. Listen. Take notes. Jot down names of potential contacts. Speak up, too! And share what you've learned with the networks you're building with others.

- Don't be shy about bringing up disproportionality to school leaders and administrators.** Meet with your school administrators or staff who may be able to answer your questions. Talk with them about the effects of disproportionality and ways to address the problem. Ask what you and others can do that would be helpful to the school or its staff. Take notes. Share what you learn with other stakeholders.

- Offer to organize/host/be involved in school cultural events.** As communities, it's important for all of us to learn about and embrace different cultures, especially those within our immediate community and school environment. Whatever you can do in this regard is helpful.



- Connect with advocacy groups.** Your Parent Center can help you identify local and state advocacy groups associated with disproportionality's key issues. Visit their websites. Sign up for their newsletters and announcements of upcoming meetings. Inform them of any relevant news you have to offer.

- Contact, and meet with, local officials, state-level administrators, and state legislators.** Decisions about how your state and its school districts will address disproportionality are being made right now at the state and local levels. Meet with decision makers to discuss issues related to inequity in schools, disproportionality in special education, and the post-school consequences for our children with disabilities of not addressing these issues with vigor and determination.