

Introduction to Significant Disproportionality



What is significant disproportionality?

“Significant disproportionality” describes a pattern where students from one or more racial and ethnic groups are identified for special education, placed in more restrictive educational settings, and disciplined at higher rates than their peers.

More specifically, Section 618 of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) requires states to collect and examine data to determine if significant disproportionality based on the seven federally identified race and ethnicity categories is occurring in the state and the LEAs of the state with respect to

- **identification** of children as children with disabilities;
- **placement** in more restrictive educational settings; and
- incidence, duration, and type of **disciplinary actions**, including suspensions and expulsions.

Why is significant disproportionality important?

Students who are misidentified as students with disabilities may have higher rates of office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions from school. These misidentified students also face limited, less rigorous curriculum and diminished opportunities before and after graduation.¹ Students who are suspended or expelled are more likely to be held back, drop out, or enter the juvenile/criminal justice system when compared to their peers.²

How do states determine if significant disproportionality exists?

Altogether, there are 98 separate calculations states use for each LEA that determine whether significant disproportionality exists in that LEA. States must use a standard methodology for these calculations and analyze the results.

IDEA regulations require states to engage interested parties when defining their criteria for determining significant disproportionality. This may include children with disabilities and their families, educators, local and state education agency staff, researchers, policymakers, and community organizations/advocacy groups.

What are the requirements and processes for addressing significant disproportionality?

When a state identifies an LEA with significant disproportionality, states must ensure that the LEA

- identifies and addresses the factors contributing to the significant disproportionality, which may include policies, practices, or procedures that contribute to the significant disproportionality and
- uses 15 percent of its federal special education funds to provide comprehensive coordinated early intervening services to address the factors contributing to the significant disproportionality.

Learn More

Do you have questions or want to learn more about significant disproportionality? The Data Center for Addressing Significant Disproportionality (DCASD) offers tools and resources at [our website](https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov/assets/downloads/2011-12_CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf).

¹Truth in labeling: *Disproportionality in special education*. (2007). United States: NEA Professional Library.

²United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. (2014). Data snapshot: School discipline. *Civil Rights Data Collection*. https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov/assets/downloads/2011-12_CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf