Significant Disproportionality Overview
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What is Significant Disproportionality?

IDEA section 618(d) requires States to collect and examine data to determine if significant disproportionality based on race and ethnicity is occurring in the State and the local educational agencies (LEAs) of the State with respect to:

(A) the identification of children as children with disabilities, including the identification of children as children with disabilities in accordance with a particular impairment;

(B) the placement in particular educational settings of such children; and

(C) the incidence, duration, and type of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions.

IDEA does not, however, define significant disproportionality. The regulations do not explicitly define the term either. Instead, they require States to use a standard methodology for analysis of disproportionality, which includes States setting a threshold above which disproportionality in the identification, placement, or discipline of children with disabilities within an LEA is significant.

How do LEAs get identified with Significant Disproportionality?

States are required to review data annually. LEAs must be above the risk ratio for three consecutive years and not demonstrate reasonable progress in lowering the applicable risk ratio in each of two consecutive prior years.

What is Analyzed?

- Identification of children with disabilities
- Identification of specific disabilities
- Intellectual disabilities; (ii) Specific learning disabilities; (iii) Emotional disturbance; (iv) Speech or language impairments; (v) Other health impairments; and (vi) Autism
- Placement (inside the regular class less than 40%)
- Placement (separate schools, residential facilities)
- Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of 10 days or fewer;
- Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of more than 10 days;
- In-school suspensions of 10 days or fewer;
- In-school suspensions of more than 10 days;
- Disciplinary removals in total, including in-school and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, removals by school personnel to an interim alternative education setting, and removals by a hearing officer.

Minimum Sizes for Analysis

Cell 10 –
The minimum number of children experiencing a particular outcome, to be used as the numerator when calculating either the risk for a particular racial or ethnic group or the risk for children in all other racial or ethnic groups.

N 30 –
The minimum number of children enrolled in an LEA with respect to identification, and the minimum number of children with disabilities enrolled in an LEA with respect to placement and discipline, to be used as the denominator when calculating either the risk for a particular racial or ethnic group or the risk for children in all other racial or ethnic groups

Pennsylvania's Thresholds based on Stakeholder Input

What is a risk ratio threshold? It is a threshold, determined by the State, over which disproportionality based on race or ethnicity is significant.

- Identification: 3.0
- Placement: 3.0
- Discipline: 2.5

What is Risk Ratio?

A calculation performed by dividing the risk of a particular outcome for children in one racial or ethnic group within an LEA by the risk for children in all other racial and ethnic groups within the LEA.

A risk ratio is a numerical comparison, expressed as a ratio or decimal, between the risk of a specific outcome for a specific racial or ethnic group in an LEA and the risk of that same outcome for all other children in the LEA. The comparison is made -- the risk ratio is calculated -- by dividing the risk of a particular outcome for children in one racial or ethnic group within an LEA by the risk of that same outcome for children in all other racial or ethnic groups within the LEA (the comparison group). Note that for risk ratios involving identification, the comparison group is children in all other racial or ethnic groups enrolled in an LEA. For risk ratios involving placement or discipline, the comparison group is children with disabilities in all other racial or ethnic groups enrolled in an LEA. (See 34 C.F.R. §300.647(a)(6).)

For example, if 40 out of 200 Hispanic children in an LEA are identified as children with disabilities, the risk of a Hispanic child being identified as a child with a disability in that LEA is 40/200 or 20 percent. If 200 out of all of the other 2,000 children in the LEA are identified as children with disabilities, then the risk of all other children being identified as children with disabilities is 200/2,000 or 10 percent. The risk ratio for Hispanic children in the LEA being identified as children with disabilities is 20/10, 2:1, or 2.0.

Similarly, in that same LEA, if 30 out of 40 Hispanic children with disabilities are placed inside a regular classroom less than 40 percent of the day, the risk of a Hispanic child with disabilities being so placed is 30/40 or 75 percent. If 150 out of the 200 children with disabilities of all other races or ethnicities in the LEA are placed in a regular classroom less than 40 percent of the day, that is also a risk of 150/200 or 75 percent. The risk ratio, then, for Hispanic children with disabilities being placed in a regular class room less than 40 percent of the day is 75/75 or 1.0.

What is an alternate risk ratio?

When the LEAs comparison data does not meet the cell (10) or n (30) sizes, the state numbers are used for comparison.

The alternate risk ratio is also a numerical comparison, expressed as a ratio or decimal, between the risk of a specific outcome for a specific racial or ethnic group in an LEA and the risk of that same outcome for a comparison group—all other children in the State, instead of all other children in the LEA. The alternate risk ratio is calculated by dividing the risk of a particular outcome for children in one racial or ethnic group within an LEA by the risk of that same outcome for children in all other racial or ethnic groups in the State.