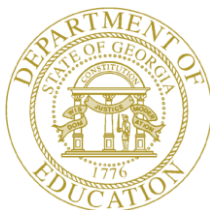


Georgia's Disproportionality Stakeholder Committee Meeting

September 14-15, 2010



Focus: Disproportionality Overview and Determination Criteria

Summary: The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) held a two-day stakeholder meeting to organize the committee's work. On day one, Lucy Ely Pagan, the National Convener of Disproportionality, provided necessary background information to guide the stakeholders in answering the following essential questions.

- (1) What is disproportionality?
- (2) What does research say about disproportionality?
- (3) Why do we have to address disproportionality?

Mrs. Ely Pagan facilitated a discussion about the federal mandates that require state educational agencies to monitor disproportionality. Her explanation of federal mandates aligned with research and practices about disproportionality. As a culminating essential thought, Mrs. Ely Pagan posed the following idea that “we are the guardians of equity”! In essence, disproportionality is a measure of equitable practices and procedures (e.g., identification, discipline, etc.) for students with disabilities (SWD) among races and ethnicities. Example –Do SWD of a particular racial or ethnic group have a greater risk of being suspended or expelled more than 10 days as compared to SWD of other racial and/or ethnic groups? If there are discrepant data, then are policies, procedures and practices contributing to this data?

Mrs. Ely Pagan also addressed the impact of institutionalized biases on disproportionate practices. It is necessary that districts have Culturally Responsive Education Systems. She offered some resources and suggested that districts begin to incorporate culturally responsive practices and an overall framework that encompasses ethics and respect.

In addition to her technical assistance, Tom Munk, the Senior Education Analyst from the Data Accountability Center (DAC), provided information regarding data calculations/methods and reviewed current guidance from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Mr. Munk shared the data elements (e.g., Significant Disproportionality for Discipline - Type, Duration, and Incidence) that each state must consider when calculating disproportionality. In addition to

this explanation, he shared data calculation best practices such as the likelihood measure that Georgia could consider to ensure that disproportionality determinations are based on valid and reliable data.

Following the national presentations, state-level personnel provided background information for the history of Georgia's implementation of the disproportionality requirements. Debbie Gay, the Director of the Division for Special Education Services and Supports, shared the historical perspective to include the following.

- (1) How does Georgia define disproportionality?
- (2) Are there root causes to this problem that are specific to Georgia's demographics?
- (3) What kinds of technical assistance and professional learning have been provided for targeted districts?
- (4) How has the GaDOE supported districts at-serious-risk of having disproportionality?
- (5) How transparent and accountable are Georgia's practices for making noncompliance determinations and verifying correction of noncompliance in a timely manner?

Next, Bonnie Dye, the State's Data Manager, provided the historical perspective as it relates to Georgia's calculation methods used in determining disproportionality. In many instances, the rationale for Georgia's calculation methods were supported by the content presented in Mr. Munk's presentation.

Nancy O'Hara, the Technical Assistance Service Coordinator for the Mid-South Regional Resource Center, ended the first day of work with questions, answers and next steps. Although Mrs. O'Hara presently works as a Technical Assistance Service Coordinator, she previously worked at the GaDOE as the Director of the Division for Special Education Services and Supports. Mrs. O'Hara has also been named the new National Convener for Disproportionality since this meeting.

Susan Durant, a Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC) staff member, assisted the State as a meeting facilitator for each committee meeting and mentored Georgia throughout the stakeholder committee process. The SERRC also assisted the state in necessary planning for technical assistance and guidance documents to support this work.

On day two, Bonnie Dye continued the technical assistance on data calculations by sharing available sources of data by which the State could use to make the disproportionality determinations. As a follow up to the previous workday, Mrs. Dye and Mr. Munk co-presented on the pros and cons of using different data sources for calculation. The committee had to demonstrate a working knowledge of data calculations in order to advise the State of necessary revisions and next steps for this process. Mrs. Dye shared two salient points with the committee.

- (1) Is this data calculation and accurate measure of disproportionality?
- (2) What would be an appropriate threshold to define disproportionality in Georgia using this calculation?

It can be quite challenging to discreetly answer each question! Question 1 helps the State to determine if the calculation meets the minimum data reporting requirements outlined by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and accurately measures disproportionality. Question 2 helps the State to describe the minimum numerical threshold to determine that a district has disproportionality. Please note that it is possible to use a data calculation method that accurately measures disproportionality but not set appropriate threshold for determinations. Although Georgia believed that most of the data calculation methods were appropriate, there were some concerns with the threshold previously used to define disproportionality.

After lunch, the content of the committee meeting shifted from the historical perspective/data to root cause analysis. Mrs. Ely Pagan and Dr. Donna Drakeford guided small workgroup discussions that would advise the State of necessary technical assistance based upon Georgia's priorities. For example, appropriate Tier 1 instruction, to include academics and school-wide behavioral supports, would positively impact the number of students inappropriately identified as needing special education and the number of students removed from receiving free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment due to disciplinary actions. As a culminating activity, Mrs. O'Hara facilitated the reporting out of each workgroup.

Recommendations:

The Stakeholder Committee made the following recommendations.

1. Local districts must understand the background perspective of disproportionality to adequately outline "next steps" to address the issues.
2. The State must ensure that its data calculation methods appropriately measure disproportionality and outline thresholds that will identify districts with disproportionate data.
3. The State should consider professional learning modules to address culturally responsive education system for local districts.
4. The Stakeholder Committee should divide into smaller workgroups (Identification/Placement, Discipline, and Data Calculation Methods) to focus on specific areas of disproportionality. Each workgroup could conduct in-depth research on specific topics and provide quality feedback.

5. At the next committee meeting, the State will continue to facilitate discussion about root causes of disproportionality. Each workgroup will research guiding questions as a homework assignment and collaborate using a webinar before the next meeting.

<i>Note: The following stakeholders attended the meeting.</i>	
Alston, Cori	GaDOE, Education Program Manager (English Speakers of Other Languages)
Blake, Mike	GaDOE, Education Program Manager (Dispute Resolution)
Constantino, Peggie	Cobb County, Special Education Director
Drakeford, Donna	GaDOE, Education Program Specialist (School Improvement Specialist)
Durant, Susan	Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC)
Dye, Bonnie	GaDOE, Education Program Specialist (Data Manager)
Ely Pagan, Lucy	National Convener of the Disproportionality Priority Team, Northeast Regional Resource Center
Falk, Jennifer	Parent to Parent of Georgia, Advocate
Freer, Paula	GaDOE, Education Program Specialist, (Emotional and Behavioral Disorders)
Fretwell, Quentin	DeKalb County, Director of Student Relations
Garcia, Mikki	Chatham County, Special Education Director
Gay, Deborah	GaDOE, Director (Division for Special Education Services and Supports)
Gibbs, Mary	Stewart County, Parent Mentor
Green, Charlette	Cherokee County, Special Education Director
Henderson, Jasolyn	GaDOE, Education Program Specialist (PBIS)
Horton, Chris	Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education (GCASE) President Fayette County, Special Education Director
Lynch, Elise	GaDOE, Education Program Specialist (Professional Learning)
McNair, Deborah	Cook County, Special Education Director
McSwain, Georgia	GaDOE, Education Program Specialist (College Readiness)
Munk, Tom	Data Accountability Center (DAC), Senior Education Analyst
Newsome, Talithia	Richmond County, Special Education Director
O'Connell, Ginny	GaDOE, Education Program Manager (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports)
O'Connor, John	DeKalb County, Executive Director of Special Services
O'Hara, Nancy	Technical Assistance Service Coordinator, Mid-South Regional Resource Center
Purdue Scott, Vicki	Fulton County, Special Education Director
Rhodes, Rob	Georgia Appleseed, Director of Legal Affairs
Walker, Adrienne	GaDOE, Assessment Research and Development
Williams, Levette	GaDOE, Associate Superintendent (Technology Management)