Final Report: How the Disproportionality Center Changed the Nature of the Conversation about Disproportionality in Special Education

This report documents the work of the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (H326E060001) funded from November 1, 2002 through October 31, 2009.

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OSEP PERFORMANCE MEASURES

A complete analysis of NCCRESt products and outcomes by OSEP’s program measures in Appendix A. Overall, 20 of the 22 NCCRESt deliverables received met all their quality criteria. Two deliverables were rated at 88% and 98% completion ratings. A distinguishing feature of all NCCRESt deliverables is the degree to which products reached school, district, and state audiences throughout the nation.

INTRODUCTION

This final report chronicles the outcomes of the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt), U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs award number # H326E060001. NCCRESt was funded in the fall of 2002, the same year in which the National Academies of Science published its second report on the disproportionate representation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and experiences in special education. Donovan and Cross (2002) synthesized the work of a national panel of experts who brought divergent disciplines, research traditions, professional experiences and roles to the task of sifting through 20 years of research on determining disproportionality, examining the influence of cognitive and behavioral development, general education and special education policies and contexts, and approaches to assessment. The report re-emphasized the dual issues of under-representation in gifted programs and over-representation in special education. It focused on four issues: (1) the degree to which social and biological contexts impact early development and school readiness; (2) how school experiences and contexts impact racial disproportionality; (3) whether biases in the referral and assessment procedures impact who is identified and staffed into special education programs, and (4) whether special and gifted education provide a benefit to students, and if benefit exists, the extent to which it has differential impact by different racial/ethnic groups. While the report advanced ideas that relate to the relationship between poverty and school performance, the schooling contexts for students from minority backgrounds, and the unclear impact of personnel bias on referral and assessment practices, it raised more questions than it answered. The Losen & Orfield (2002) book on Racial Inequality in Special Education offered additional perspectives on these issues and made a compelling case for an underlying, institutionalized bias in the design and delivery of educational services for students who were culturally and linguistically diverse. The development of the National Center on Disproportionality was an outgrowth of growing concerns and troubling data.

The Center was established before the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA ’04). Much of the first 18 months of the Center was dedicated to creating a sense of urgency for action on disproportionality in each of the 50 states and the 10 territories. A key conceptual shift that NCCRESt brought to the disproportionality agenda was the premise that racial inequities in special education constitute both a general and special education issue. This conceptual shift changed substantially how disproportionality was explained and addressed. It also required that key local and state educational leaders coalesce to address the problem systemically. This systems stance was defined as the intersection of policy, standards of practice, and the personal that converge in schools. This concept shift pivoted reform efforts from incremental improvements to procedural implementation to understanding and addressing the problem of racial inequities in special education as a manifestation of underlying structural and social cultural
issues embedded within the educational system. NCCRES’s work marked a historic moment in education since it was the first time in the history of this problem that whole education communities responded to this issue.

Once IDEA ’04 was authorized, State Education Agencies (SEAs) were focused on establishing a definition and process for determining disproportionality. SEAs sought out and participated with NCCRES to set and implement policy around disproportionality. This report provides an analysis of that work and its impact on changes in schools for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. NCCRES’s charge was clear: (1) Increase the use of prevention and early intervening strategies, and (2) decrease inappropriate referrals to special education, and (3) increase the number of schools using effective literacy and behavioral interventions for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. And, as our data show, we met these outcomes. NCCRES focused on two critical pathways. The first was to expand the field’s understanding of disproportionality and its impact on students and their families. The second was to harness current and emerging research in ways that would advance practice, inform policy, and transform professional learning. Along the way, our work produced several critical lessons learned that we highlight in the third section of this report: Policy Implications of NCCRES’s work:

1. **How the Public Health Model Improves Systems of TA.** Technical assistance must be built on a public health model in which a tiered system of information sharing and development begins with high quality information made available electronically, moves to a second level of regional face to face knowledge building activities, and culminates in a tier of intensive model building in strategically located sites.

2. **Competing Agendas within ED’s TA and D networks.** The Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network funded by the Office of Special Education Programs has the potential to strengthen SEA systems of support to their LEAs but the divergent and diverse agendas that mark the OSEP Content Centers and the Regional Resource Centers make collaborative efforts difficult to sustain through overlapping funding cycles. Further, the work of the Equity Assistance Centers, the Comprehensive Education Labs, the Comprehensive Centers and the Content Centers that are also major sources of support offer their own set of constraints and affordances to facilitating SEA an LEA improvement.

3. **Use of Research Knowledge.** A sound TA model requires investments in promoting new understandings/framings of the problem as well as producing and supporting the use of tools that enable practitioners and leaders to change program structures and practices.

4. **Paucity of State Education Agency (SEA) Capacity.** Most SEAs (40 out of 50 states) lacked sufficient resources to provide technical assistance and professional learning out of the SEA office. State budgets and investments in education made the ability of SEAs to lead education reform difficult.

In subsequent sections, this report chronicles the project’s history and then describes our approaches to improving understanding and use of research. A third section examines the policy implications of what we learned. Two appendices provide outcome measure data (Appendix A) and a complete listing of all NCCRES products (Appendix B).
NCCRESt’s History

Originally located on the campus of the University of Colorado, Denver, NCCRESt moved to Arizona State University in 2006 and completed its work in 2009. In seven swift years, NCCRESt accomplished a great deal while being immersed in a decade of educational change that was rivaled only by the period of time from 1957 to 1967. While comprehensive school reform initiatives flowered in the nineties, few of those initiatives focused on bringing special education services into unified reform efforts, much less how special education outcomes could be used as a barometer of success in general education. When the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded NCCRESt, it was assumed that NCCRESt would focus its efforts on improving the procedures for referring, identifying and placing students in special education. But a confluence of research and the re-interpretation of troubling data from special education converged in 2002. Disproportionality re-emerged as a national education crisis at the same time that some researchers were calling for more emphasis on early intervening and prevention rather than special education remediation. As a result, school-wide positive behavior supports, response to intervention (RTI), and early intervening emerged as important redesign strategies. Unfortunately, these redesign strategies embarked on parallel tracks that shared incomplete and, at times, opposing theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Mostly unconscious of the potential pitfalls, each reform effort was thwarted or slowed by a much more powerful Federal initiative that changed the landscape of educational practice that same year: No Child Left Behind, the Bush administration’s reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965.

The National Academy of Sciences commissioned the National Research Council (NRC) report on Minority Students in Special and Gifted Education (2002) and the 20th Annual Report to Congress provide chilling evidence of the overrepresentation of minority students in Special Education. Of particular concern is over-representation of students from African-American and Native American backgrounds in particular disability categories. Both reports provide similar data on disproportionate over-or under representation for Hispanics and for Asians and Pacific Islanders. The NRC report indicates a wide variation among States and notable inconsistencies within States. The interactive effects of culture, poverty, and environmental factors require professionals across disciplines to develop and implement culturally responsive models and approaches for educating all students (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010). In summarizing the factors that contribute to disproportionate representation, the NRC Report concluded (Donovan & Cross, pp. 5-6):

1. Among the most frequent reasons for referral to special education are reading difficulties and behavior problems.
2. In recent years, interventions appropriate for the general education classroom to improve reading instruction and classroom management have been demonstrated to reduce the number of children who fail at reading or are later identified with behavior disorders.
3. There are currently no mechanisms in place to guarantee that students will be exposed to state of the art reading instruction or classroom management before they are identified as having a “within-child” problem.
4. Referral for high-incidence categories of special education currently requires student failure. However, screening mechanisms exist for early identification of children at risk for later reading and behavior problems. And the effectiveness of early intervention in both areas has been demonstrated to be considerably greater than the effectiveness of later, post-failure intervention.
NCCRESt was predicated on the premise that overrepresentation should be addressed through the creation of culturally responsive educational systems. Instead of determining how to “fix” minority students’ deficits or professionals’ biases, NCCRESt was designed to create conditions, produce resources and tools, and support multiple stakeholders in the creation of educational systems that are responsive to cultural diversity. NCCRESt drew from the scholarship on culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy and educational systems (Gallego, Cole, & the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 2001; Gay, 2000; Hilliard, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the belief that students learn in a race- and class-conscious schools that reflect the social order of their communities but they can excel in academic endeavors if their cultures, languages, heritages, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate their learning and development. These systems are concerned with instilling an understanding of the complex dilemmas faced by minority students in the US education system in the professionals that serve minority students. This extends to supporting the use of curricula with ethnic and cultural diversity content, encouraging the use of communication strategies that build on students’ cultures, and nurturing the creation of school cultures that are concerned with deliberative and participatory discourse practices (Gay, 2000). Moreover, culturally responsive educational systems create spaces for teacher reflection, inquiry, and mutual support around issues of cultural differences; key questions that are consistently researched and addressed include the explanations for the differential achievement of minority students, the conceptions of “self” and “others” that inform pedagogical practices, the social relations structured in the cultures of schools and classrooms, the conceptions of knowledge that inform pedagogical, curricular, and assessment practices, and the consequences of these assumptions for academic and social outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

These notions were almost invisible in the special education literature at the time that NCCRESt was funded and had only begun to surface in critical education discourse of the nineties and the early years of the 21st century. Thus one of NCCRESt’s challenges from the beginning was to help lay the foundation for understanding how race, class, and culture intersects with the learning conditions and opportunities that are created in classrooms. Educational leaders and practitioners needed much more nuanced understandings of these constructs and how they participated and co-constructed culture, race, and ability in curricula, pedagogy, and in interactions with families and communities.

**Cross Disciplinary Borders: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Intersection of Culture, Learning, and Dis/Ability**

The genesis of minority representation is located beyond the borders of special education and this problem requires a solid understanding of the intersection of culture, learning, disability, and the socio-historical constitution of educational processes and outcomes. Thus, NCCRESt’s products reflected a concern to integrate knowledge bases that enhance our understandings of culture, development, and institutional practices. For instance, cultural psychology and some groups of developmental psychologists have produced a knowledge base on the link between learning and culture. This literature gives explicit attention to the social origins of learning, the cultural mediation of human activity, and the requirement that human development be studied historically (Trent et al., 1998). This framework enables practitioners and researchers to understand that student competence and performance as well as pedagogical processes is immersed in culture.
Similarly, the definition of culture is key to practitioner understanding of overrepresentation. A sound definition of culture should encompass both within-group variability and the classroom cultures that are socially created in and shaped by the historically charged contexts of schools. School cultures define what it takes to be competent, what counts as being articulate or smart, and the cultural capital required to navigate and use institutional resources for individual advancement (e.g., how to ask questions, how to negotiate with counselors course placement decisions, how to be challenging in sanctioned ways). Through the use of a view of culture that accounts for classroom cultures and the cultures in the classroom (Gallego et al., 2001), NCCRESt’s products and activities have promoted a better understanding of the performance of minority students. Panels of external advisors who reviewed and used our products have provided external validation of the ways in which NCCRESt products have helped users to reexamine assumptions about which students are competent. Moreover, notions of what constitutes “failure to respond” are challenged by understanding the fluid and potent nature of cultural assumptions and expectations about knowledge and the processes of learning.

NCCRESt employed a fluid and instrumental view of culture in which students and teachers are not boxed in categorical identities (e.g., poor Latino low-achieving students or white, middle-class teachers). NCCRESt’s syntheses integrated and disseminated scholarship that (a) took into account students’ cultural toolkits as defined by both their group heritage and unique life histories and (b) documented how classroom cultures enhance or constrain the implementation of interventions in multicultural classrooms. NCCRESt drew on academic, scholarly work from a variety of related disciplines and areas of study including the sociology of education, organizational theory, cultural studies, legal studies, political science, social psychology, policy and fiscal studies, urban planning and urban geography, and history. These disciplines assisted the NCCRESt team to help audiences understand overrepresentation and promote the use of research based knowledge around aspects such as resiliency in minority students’ and families’ lives, understandings of institutional processes and factors that can enable or constrain minorities’ performance in various school contexts, and leadership issues in the administration of urban and suburban schools in the midst of multiple reforms, among others.

Equally important to NCCRESt’s concern for interdisciplinary work was the need to account for multiple perspectives on issues. For this purpose, we tapped into families’ and students’ perceptions and beliefs about instructional innovations and reforms and about the overrepresentation of children of color in special education. NCCRESt synthesized cutting edge views about exemplary practices in special education and related disciplines that were mindful of both cultural differences and the unique educational needs that require specialized intense interventions. A complete list of all our products can be found in Appendix B.

SYNTHESIZE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE KNOWLEDGE: SCALING UP, INSTITUTIONALIZATION, AND SUSTAINABILITY

NCCRESt was informed by the assumption that practitioners work in complex cultural milieus and thus, the use of research knowledge requires that professionals change what they think and do and transform the contexts in which they work. Once practitioners begin to adopt new practices, the challenge is how to institutionalize and ensure the sustainability of such changes. The work of the NCCRESt relied on the growing literature on school change and the sustainability of research-based practices, some of which was generated by the NCCRESt’s co-principal investigators (Alfredo Artiles, Beth Harry, Janette Klingner,
Elizabeth Kozleski, and William Tate) and advisory board members. Successful efforts were facilitated when technical assistance partners: (a) assure that there is feasibility and fit of a new practice in teachers’ classrooms, (b) demonstrate both the general value of the practice and its potential for improving student performance, (c) help teachers understand how the new practice differs from what they have been using, (d) provide coaches and mentors to work with teachers, (e) communicate frequently with school personnel, (f) provide materials and other resources, and (g) work closely with school district and state personnel so that the practices they are teaching are aligned with the district’s curriculum and the state’s standards (Ferguson, Kozleski & Smith, 2003).

Teacher beliefs, feelings of self-efficacy, attitudes, and perceptions all affect the extent to which teachers try new strategies and persist in using them even when confronted with challenges (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Change can be difficult even in the best of circumstances, and for teachers implementing new instructional practices it can be daunting. Teachers are often faced with the need to reconcile differences between long-term goals and short-term needs and to balance their experiential knowledge with new research knowledge (Lieberman, 2000). When faced with too many challenges and discord between new knowledge and existing knowledge, it is sometimes easier to revert back to known and familiar patterns. A community of teachers and researchers can provide support while teachers make the shift towards improved practice (Pressley & El Dinary, 1997). Teachers need to see concrete examples of how a new theory relates to their students and their circumstances. If teachers do not see the relevance of the strategy to their situation, little change is likely to occur (Englert & Tarrant, 1995). By adapting a new strategy to fit their needs, teachers make the strategy more relevant to their classrooms and develop a sense of ownership, which in turn promotes change. Datnow, McHugh, Stringfield and Hacker (1998) define this as mutual adaptation. This concept describes a flexible construct that exists between teachers and researchers in the implementation of a strategy to fit the unique needs of the school context without losing sight of the strategy’s original purpose. Professional development efforts must acknowledge the history and unique characteristics of the contexts and communities in which research knowledge is being utilized, including the contexts of general education. In subsequent sections, we explore these concepts through the lens of the lessons learned throughout the NCCRESSt project.

**UNDERSTANDING OVERREPRESENTATION**

A sound TA model requires investments in promoting new understandings/framings of the problem as well as producing and supporting the use of tools that enable practitioners and leaders to change program structures and practices. NCCRESSt produced new knowledge by situating the disproportionality problem in broader contextual and historical conditions AND created tool and resources to tackle the problem from a more comprehensive perspective that included attention to institutional, technical, and personal factors.

Even if teachers themselves are able to explore their own cultural boundaries and learn to reach out to their students and connect and engage them in learning, they often do so in spite of the systems that surround them (Kozleski & Smith, 2009). Individual excellence in culturally responsive teaching can only become collective tradition when the contexts in which teachers practice and learn are able to support, sustain and expect culturally responsive practice. While school leaders often seek teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, they do so without a deep understanding of what culturally responsive practices and systems could be and accomplish. To engage in substantive transformation of our current educational systems requires changes in the “fundamental assumptions, practices and relationships, both within the organization,


and between the organization and the outside world, in ways that lead to improved student learning outcomes” (Elmore, 2000, pp. 4). The real challenge of school renewal is changing old assumptions and practices to reinvent schools rather than simply making additions or corrections to existing practice (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). One path to creating culturally responsive systems is by working at systemic reform (Ferguson, Kozleski, & Smith, 2003).

System characteristics are often so familiar to the people involved in them that they seem invisible. Systems have a life and dynamic of their own that resists change (Bateson, 1972). To think about culturally responsive educational systems requires looking at the processes, decision and communication paths that are used to make and sustain changed practice (Beyer, 1996). It should be no surprise to observe that the hierarchical systems that have been created in most public school districts and schools mirror our military and traditional business organizations. Policy decisions are made by a few individuals at the top of a pyramid of workers and are conveyed to the workers or practitioners who, in turn, convey them to families and students. Even in enlightened and reformed educational systems, where site-based decision-making prevails, the kinds of participatory communication and decision making that mark some cultures are rarely present (Bondy, Ross, Sindelar & Griffin, 1995). Thus, teachers who may engage in culturally responsive teaching practices receive rather than construct policy and practice around teacher development, assessment and evaluation. This mismatch between expected practice in the classroom and systems of administration and leadership in the school can create tension and signal the system’s preference for conformity over diversity. This helps explain why classroom and school practices may be so intractable. Educational systems try to maintain equilibrium in order to sustain familiar, and therefore predictable, routines and practices.

Conversely, practitioners thrive and are better able to innovate, support student effort, and generate improved outcomes when their organizations support and encourage their cultural responsibility through systems of leadership that also meet standards of culturally responsive practice. Organizational support for culturally responsive practice must, in turn, be supported by initial educator preparation and ongoing professional development opportunities that enable educators to acquire and build this capacity. Teachers and other school personnel are able to engage in sustained, thoughtful, continually improving and reflective practice if the school organization is able to provide a milieu or environment that supports professional practice (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Schools that organize themselves to create time for these rich conversations are able to sustain this kind of dialog over time (Klingner, Artiles, Kozleski, Utley, Zion, Tate, Harry, Zamora-Durán, & Riley, 2005).

Schools are nested in districts and districts in states and states within national policy (Kozleski & Smith, 2009). The nested nature of these systems suggests that one system operates impacting all of the parts. But the education system in the US even without considering the impact of the private education sector is more of a confederacy of systems than one unified system with multiple levels. Constitutionally, states have the responsibility for education which places the role of the federal government in a particular space in which some but not all educational decisions and visions are set nationally. This also means that depending on the political climate within a state, national TA funded projects may have difficulty providing meaningful and impactful support. And, in states where most education funding is raised locally and/or flows into local coffers, state education agencies may have little or no funding to provide leadership for change through technical assistance and professional learning (Datnow, 2005). Also, districts in large school districts are often more complex and have more bureaucracy than the state agency. The power brokers are as likely to be local
superintendents as they are chief state school officers. So, power and authority are distributed in unique ways
within states and make change more complex as well. Understanding how states operate is key to providing
effective, sustainable, and scalable change. Part of understanding lies in knowing how systems operate. To
build this understanding NCCRES’s developed state profiles for six states that we worked closely with:
Connecticut, North Carolina, New Jersey, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.

SITE PROFILES

The purpose of this profile was to benchmark the state’s status regarding students from culturally and
linguistically diverse backgrounds. This profile was prepared in consultation with representatives from the
state’s education agency as well as families and key participants from local educational agencies. The profile
elements are drawn from NCCRES’s conceptual framework identifying contributors and constraints for
disproportionate representation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in special
education. The Policy Environment, particularly Implementation of No Child Left Behind and section
618(c) of IDEA ’97 reporting requirements are the major policy elements reviewed. The conceptual
framework aids in the collection of data pertinent to the state picture, capturing social and economic context
as well as any major initiatives, policies, grants related to culturally responsive system building and
disproportionality. Other key framework elements leads to important data sets in areas such as professional
development (e.g., Title II focus, SIG and CSPD grants), school leadership, teacher preparation, state level
quality literacy instruction initiatives, systemic work with Positive Behavior Supports, early intervention
strategies, and community and family inclusion efforts. Student data is the bottom line, however, and we are
able to capture and examine a wide variety of disaggregated data sets such as enrollment patterns, achievement
on state and other tests, graduation rates, and special education eligibility, placement, and setting rates.

State Profiles were created for Wisconsin and Tennessee, two of the Center’s partner states. The Profile is a
snapshot of each state’s efforts to provide for the education of students with disabilities and students from
culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds using NCCRES’s conceptual framework for culturally
responsive educational systems that focuses on the connections between people, policies, and practices. Our
goal is to use this framework to understand how these relationships impact opportunities to learn, equity, and
learning outcomes for students and their families as well as how they affect the practitioners employed within
systems. This report emphasizes the complexity of the state’s work and the challenges that many other states
also experience as they work to redress disproportionality in special education. The relationship to the broader
social context and to disparity in other institutions is highlighted.

DATA VISUALIZATION

The mediating power of technical assistance can be
harnessed when intervention begins with data
visualization and analysis, connects to the core functions
and agendas of an SEA and participating LEAS, and
results in building the intellectual and practice capital of
the participating partners.
Data maps were used to track how students with significant support needs were served in the least restrictive environment, compared by racial or ethnic category. These maps were invaluable for looking at patterns of performance over time.

The Data Site was (and is) a sophisticated repository of national, state and district level data from readily available public resources brought together in order to facilitate a focus on systems change. Data from sources such as IDEA, Title 2, OCR and NCES have been added. Summaries can be added from any public analysis of these and other sources of data that have a bearing on school improvement. This data warehouse allows users to examine ethnic diversity of students in special education in participating districts as well as districts’ particular special education labels and cross tab these data with referral, placement and achievement.

In addition, school by school levels of adoption and fidelity of implementation track for implementing practices in reading, behavior and early intervention and progress in achieving improvements. Data are available from Chicago, Miami, the District of Columbia, Clark County Schools (Las Vegas), Denver Public Schools, Hacienda la Puente (Los Angeles), Madison (WI), and Memphis. An important breakthrough in technology was the successful development and installation of a security system enabling Chicago, Miami, and District Columbia data, and data from future sites, to be uploaded directly from the local site to the site.

An introductory presentation about the maps assists users in understanding and using the site. Interactive maps and tables on the site present the distributions of students with disabilities across various disability categories by ethnic/racial category and teacher qualifications to help practitioners and policy makers at the local and state levels understand their own status in relationship to disproportionate representation in special education.

Maps and tables are available by state as well as by some key cities. These maps are based on tables of data from the osepdata.org and are interactive. That is, users can sort and order columns of information to help see their state data in a variety of contexts. Users can also make choices and then see (or print) trend graphs and comparative histogram graphs at the state level. Because the graphical interface maintains historical data, systems can look at change over time. Once systems were able to understand their performance in relation to others, they were more prepared to examine root causes, make strategic investments to change the course of events, and measure their successes against a set of benchmarks. NCCRESt offered intensive coaching through onsite technical assistance, network meetings, professional learning academies, and ongoing web-based, telephone, and face-to-face meetings.

For instance, we know several placement patterns have been consistently observed over the history of this problem. African Americans and Native Americans have been overrepresented at the national level; African Americans in MR and E/BD and Native Americans in the LD category. Another consistent finding is that Asian Americans are underrepresented in disability categories (with the occasional exception of speech and language impairments). Latinos have been overrepresented in the MR and LD categories at the state and district levels. However, it is crucial to bear in mind these patterns may vary depending on the characteristics of local contexts and the level at which data are examined (national, state, district, school), the size of the district, and the representation of a group in the district (see Donovan & Cross, 2002 and Heller et al. 1982 for examples). The NRC report concluded that there is wide variation among States and notable inconsistencies within States in the data collected on placement rates (Donovan & Cross).
Longitudinal analyses can shed light on the evolution of overrepresentation in a particular context and provide evidence of the progress made to eradicate the problem. Other potential aspects needed in monitoring systems include the potential influence of general education reforms (e.g., elimination of bilingual education, accountability, testing, and standards) and contextual forces (e.g., social class level of district, school, and individual student; school climate).

**USE OF RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE AND STRATEGIES THAT PREVENT OVERREPRESENTATION**

_NCCRESt_ promoted the use of research knowledge and strategies to prevent overrepresentation. This was achieved through the implementation of four interrelated initiatives. First, consistent with the theoretical framework of the NCCRESt, it is assumed the overrepresentation problem cannot be understood or solved by examining placement patterns only; what is needed is the transformation and improvement of educational systems in a culturally responsive fashion. For this purpose, NCCRESt offered professional development activities for SEAs and LEAs through assets mapping (identifying the capacitors within systems), continuous school improvement processes (i.e., data mining, strategic, whole school professional development efforts), and leadership academies. The focus of these professional development activities were on early intervening. NCCRESt ensured that its products were used effectively at the SEA and LEA levels through the creation of networking and dissemination teams. The importance and magnitude of the outcomes of the NCCRESt’s efforts will be substantial and far-reaching. And, because of NCCRESt’s focus on networking and collaborating with other major initiatives and its systematic and widespread efforts to build local capacity, the legacy of NCCRESt has continued after its funding was completed.

**LEADERSHIP ACADEMIES**

Our priority was to provide the highest level of quality professional development modules for professional developers and teachers on topics such as culturally responsive RTI, assessment and culturally responsive pedagogy. To do this, we recruited experts in the subjects of our professional development training, ensuring accurate, comprehensive and exceptional modules. Employing a wide range of subject matter experts allowed us to offer an extensive and varying list of modules. Although the modules were all unique in their subject, they were all similar in their presentation and adhered to NCCREST’s professional development values and beliefs.

The similarities in presentation were very important for our professional development approach. All professional development modules had the same visual layout and support materials, as well as the same presentation format. We believe this provided structure for developing quality modules as each one had predetermined criteria for subject matter experts to “fill in”, and layouts for handouts and presentations that ensured all modules were uniform.

This likeness was also important so the modules could be distinctively identified as NCCREST modules. The participants who attended professional development modules by NCCREST were immediately aware by the uniformity that the module they were taking is going to be similar in quality as any other module they had taken. The approach included careful consideration of the content for professional learning, application of
adult learning principles, and selection of teams from schools and districts that can support their team members’ learning and practice. In this way, professional learning builds on converged needs, creates a sense of common purpose, and extends the creativity and skill of practitioners.

All Leadership Academies were based on NCCRESt’s assumptions that culturally responsive educational systems are built on the following principles:

- Use the valuable knowledge and experience that children and their families bring to school learning.
- Expand students’ life opportunities, available choices, and community contributions.
- Construct education for social justice, access, and equity.
- Build on the extraordinary resources that urban communities provide for life-long earning.
- Need individuals, family, organizations, and communities to work together to create future generations of possibility.
- Practice scholarship by creating partnerships for action-based research and inquiry.
- Shape their practice based on evidence of what results in successful learning of each student.
- Foster relationships based on care, respect, and responsibility.
- Produce high achieving students.
- Understand that people learn in different ways throughout their lives.
- Respond with learning opportunities that work.

Academy participants were generally teams of educational professionals from schools and districts, selected to advance knowledge and practice related to culturally responsive systems and practices. Academies were organized into modules that shared an overarching theme and are designed to (1) engage adult learners in advancing their knowledge and skills about culturally responsive practices within organizations; (2) build communities of practice in which inquiry and public discourse are cornerstones of continuous improvement in culturally responsive systems; and (3) embody approaches to learning that affirm the sociocultural histories and experiences that all members of the academies bring to shared learning. The Leadership Academies created forums for open discussion to help participants think more broadly and systemically about culturally responsive schools and classrooms.

The format of the NCCREST modules was simple. All of NCCREST’s three-hour academies were the same: the layout consisted of three activities broken up by two lectureettes. Every module was designed with three academies that built knowledge, skills, and practices clustered around particular aspects of school wide improvement such as inclusion. The intent was simple: Build a common vision, vocabulary, and skill set around essential elements of school improvement. Academies were offered in sequence from academies 1 – 3 and spaced about four weeks apart, so that some application could occur between sessions.

To obtain modules that had the layout and structure wanted, we designed a development system for subject matter experts to use alone or in partnership with the NCCREST instructional designer. As soon as the subject matter expert was identified, s/he worked closely with the instructional designer to ensure that the module progressed smoothly, on time and as to specifications. This relationship was especially important so the subject matter expert did not feel overwhelmed by the amount of work, did not lose track of the purpose of the module and retained the NCCREST layout and format.
The base for this system was a document called the PD Academy Matrix. This brainstorming tool listed the title of the module and academy, the summary of the academy and the objectives of the academy. These provided a visual reminder of the purpose of the academy. Below these data, the matrix was divided into five columns, three for activities and two for lecturettes. This was the space for brainstorming the content of the activity. How were the objectives of the academy going to be met? What activities would provide participants with skills and knowledge the academy promised? What did they need to learn between the activities – what did we need to teach them in the short lecturettes as scaffolding for the next activity? Every academy had the following features: (1) Participant Outcomes; (2) Warm up and introduction to the key ideas; (3) 2 lecturettes; (4) 3 participant activities designed to be accomplished in small teams; (5) an evaluation and (6) an annotated reference list.

This tool was the first step in creating a module. It was used in collaboration with the NCCREST instructional designer so the outline of the module, the activities and the lecturettes, were mutually acceptable in both content and scope. Once this scaffolding was complete, the subject matter expert could either complete the module independently, or use the instructional design team at NCCREST to help format some or the entire module. Experts had varying levels of technical expertise and were comfortable in some or all of the formatting requirements of the module. For example: An expert may have wished to simply write the module in script form in a document and send the module to NCCREST. The team at NCCREST could take the script and transfer it into the preformatted template, create PowerPoints for the lecturettes and design handouts for the activities.

The preferred method for delivery was face-to-face. Optimally, bringing together leadership teams from a SEAs or districts, depending on the target audience, helped to create a practice community that could network among its members. The academies were designed to be offered in sequence, spaced four weeks apart so that some application can occur between sessions as well as ongoing coaching. The modules included consist of the following:

Table 1. Leadership Academy Module Titles

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<tr>
<th>Modules</th>
<th>Academy</th>
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<tr>
<td>4. Collection and Use of Evidence</td>
<td>1. Mining Meaningful Data</td>
<td>2. Identifying School-wide Patterns of Student Performance</td>
<td>3. Looking at Student Work to Target Instruction</td>
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<td>Modules</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Culturally Responsive Literacy</td>
<td>1. Literacy for What?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction: What does it look like in classrooms?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Boundary Crossings – Creating Language Experiences in the Classroom for ALL Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Culturally Responsive RTI Frameworks</td>
<td>4. Overview of Culturally Responsive RTI</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Using data to assess student progress and inform educational decisions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. Ensuring culturally responsive student supports</td>
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**Professional Learning Principles**

NCCRESt had a set of *Professional Learning Principles* for work with educators who work in practice, policy, and research settings. These principles emerged from a variety of research traditions, particularly those focused on sociocultural perspectives. As a lens for understanding human learning, sociocultural perspectives help us understand the relationship between individual psychological characteristics, identification with and mastery of specific cultural and linguistic heritages, and the contexts in which learning occurs. This perspective offers us a way of understanding the interaction between the tasks or activities that focus learning and the various ways that the tasks may be understood and valued by learners. The kinds of intellectual and affective tools that learners bring to tasks, or the kinds of tools they may need to develop, are also influenced by the nature of tasks and the learners’ own cultural and psychological characteristics. This framework was particularly useful as the United States navigates the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of our school-age population. These principles were been influenced by research from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) as well as the National Staff Development Council.

**PRINCIPLE 1:** Professional Learning is focused on improving learning within a diverse, multicultural community. The diverse, multicultural context that characterizes most contemporary communities must be grounded in the outcomes, content, and activities of any professional learning activity.

**PRINCIPLE 2:** Professional Learning engages educators in joint, productive activity through discourse, inquiry, and public practice. Effective professional learning is reached by continuous, collaborative interaction with colleagues through discussion, knowledge development and understanding, and directed inquiry around practice.

**PRINCIPLE 3:** Professional Learning is a facet of daily practice, not a compartmentalized activity. Since professional learning is embedded within practice, it becomes part of daily discourse, shared discussions about student learning and student products, as well as more formalized mentoring and coaching, meetings, study groups, and examination of evidence from inquiry cycles.
PRINCIPLE 4: Professional Learning results in improved learning for students who have been marginalized from the academic and social curricula of the US public school system. Professional learning scaffolds teacher learning so that the influence of individual cultural identity and values on individual and systems practices are understood, mediated by expanding professional knowledge of the sociocultural dimensions of learning, and its impact assessed through student involvement and performance in academic and social curricula.

PRINCIPLE 5: Professional Learning influences decisions about what is taught and why. Since professional learning is generative, educators’ knowledge will expand and become more complex as it develops. It is expected that professional learning will result in examination and improvements to the content and process of instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

PRINCIPLE 6: Professional learning is focused on the diffusion of professional knowledge to build sustainable educational communities focused on improving learning outcomes for students and their families who are culturally and linguistically diverse. As educators gain knowledge, they also have the responsibility for sharing and mentoring others both in the practice of professional learning and in the expanded knowledge that comes from such activity.

Combining both consistent formatting and planning ensures that all modules developed for NCCREST are both distinctive and exceptional. Anyone attending a NCCREST professional development module can be assured that their experience will result in better learning and life experiences for educators and their students.

**WEBSITE**

NCCREST’s Web site (www.nccrest.org) was particularly successful as a result of the public relations efforts detailed in the strategic dissemination and networking plan. It was continually updated, monitored, and refined, especially the sections that housed our products. Over the course of the project NCCREST averaged about 1 million unique hits per year, about 860,000 library searches per year, and about 280,000 individual downloads of NCCREST materials.
POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF NCCREST’S WORK

HOW THE PUBLIC HEALTH MODEL IMPROVES SYSTEMS OF TA

Investments in educational technical assistance can be conceptualized much as the public health model in which a tiered system of information sharing and development begins with high quality information made available electronically, moves to a second level of regional face to face knowledge building activities, and culminates in a tier of intensive model building in strategically located sites. This coordinated and well executed, tiered system increases the capacity for reaching every state, influencing state and local policy, and building local resources and leaders. This coordinated and well executed, tiered system increases the capacity for reaching every state, influencing state and local policy, and building local resources and leaders.

This strategy does not rely on the capacity of the SEA alone to deliver information to its public schools. The mediating power of technical assistance can be harnessed when intervention begins with data visualization and analysis, connects to the core functions and agendas of an SEA and participating LEAs, and results in building the intellectual and practice capital of the participating partners. Our work with eight SEAs provided the crucible in which we learned together how to inform, influence, and produce change.

These eight states were an important part of the NCCRESst TA strategy. First, we needed to test our ideas and implementation strategies in diverse SEAs in various contexts (large and small states, different demographics, unique political configurations, varying levels of expertise in the design and delivery of inclusive education, and varying external influences and confluences). Second, the SEAs offered opportunities to link with other states so that our work could be disseminated through existing networks. From intense, sustained interaction with these eight SEAs, the NCCRESst team built a set of tools for change that can be implemented with U.S. school systems as disparate as San Juan, Puerto Rico and Pullman, Washington or Memphis, Tennessee and Madison, Wisconsin.

The emphasis in our work was to provide systems for change that could travel across state boundaries and create the impetus for locally embedded, systems work that resulted in improving educational outcomes for students who were culturally and linguistically diverse. Focused intervention with a few states provided exemplars for this work that are detailed in our state profiles. Group specific activities like our annual forums, certification trainings, and regional meetings produced a large readership and user group for our products. About 12,000 people were recruited and became return participants in many of NCCRESst’s activities. At the base level, over NCCRESst’s project life, staff made over 200 presentations at national and regional conferences, and produced a 3000 item searchable, online library of resources, 40 downloadable posters of art by students, 18 professional learning modules, 12 practitioner briefs, 12 quarterly publications, 6 state profiles, 5 tools for mediating local practice, 3 exemplars, 1 DVD set, 1 website, and 1 core framework. This resulted in a strong record of use on the site reported above but averaged about 1 million hits per year.

COMPETING AGENDAS WITHIN ED’S TA & D NETWORKS

The Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network funded by the Office of Special Education Programs together has the potential to strengthen SEA systems of support to their LEAs but the Content Centers and the Regional Resource Centers have diverse and divergent agendas that make collaborative efforts difficult to sustain over funding cycles. Since some of these Centers are considerably better funded than the OSEP
centers, they tend to be more attractive for SEAs and LEAS to connect with. For states making choices about what resources to use, the task of coordinating all the “help” can overshadow getting the work done. Long term relationships with individuals and groups may trump selection based on knowledge, expertise, and impact data. When collaborative efforts are successful, they are often at the bottom of the pyramid of support where the most dissemination but the least focused and dedicated coaching and systemic learning occurs.

**USE OF RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE**

A sound TA model requires investments in promoting new understandings/framings of the problem as well as producing and supporting the use of tools that enable practitioners and leaders to change program structures and practices. NCCRESt produced new knowledge by situating the disproportionality problem in broader contextual and historical conditions AND created tool and resources to tackle the problem from a more comprehensive perspective that included attention to institutional, technical, and personal factors. The importance of this approach is critical to understanding NCCRESt’s success in reaching a broad audience of practitioners, families, education leaders, policy makers, and researchers. Over the course of five years, NCCRESt staff produced 36 refereed articles and another 4 books that highlighted the issues that NCCRESt engaged. The connections between recognition in the research community for developing frameworks and visibility in the practice world was important as a bridge to establishing the credibility of NCCRESt products and activities

**PAUCITY OF STATE CAPACITY**

Initially, no more than 10 states had a handful researchers and professional developers who understood and were able to provide intensive professional learning around disproportionality. Tensions between an emphasis on compliance and accountability and innovation were evident in at least 15 state departments. These tensions often produced attention to meeting outcomes without changing underlying causes. For instance, some SEAs focused on the accountability measurement for disproportionality but spent little time on building preventative and early intervening strategies. Perhaps linked to this issue, SEA thresholds for identifying LEAs with potential disproportionality issues increased from 2005 to 2009 for a variety of reasons including the difficulty in resourcing on-the-ground technical assistance with limited state budgets and personnel well prepared to carry out complex interventions around disproportionality. LEAs showed the most improvement in reducing false positives (placing students in special education whose performance on assessments was likely due to impoverished opportunities to learn rather than innate disabilities) when (1) the LEA leadership focused on clear improvement goals, and (2) professional learning content focused on both improving principals’ knowledge of and leadership for culturally responsive practices, and improving teacher practice in the classroom. This was often accomplished without SEA intervention. The advent of Response to Intervention (RTI) was loosely linked to reducing disproportionality.

By the end of the 2008, most but not all states and territories were recognizing disproportionality as a systemic issue shaped by policies, procedures, and practices in general education. This perspective is reflected in the improvement activities reported by the states, which largely focus on improving services and instruction for all students. As noted in previous years’ analyses for indicators 9 and 10, many (n = 20) states did not consult with any TA providers in addressing disproportionality, although they may have used the NCCRESt website as a source for information and professional learning. Few states (n=10) were using their regional resource centers or TA&D providers related to their improvement activities, such as PBS or RTI. This
suggests that assistance and professional learning were being accessed outside the TA network, using researchers and professional development organizations.

CONCLUSION

Artiles (1998) challenged the binary debate that frames explanations for why students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are over-represented in programs such as special education as either the result of the detrimental effects of certain socio-demographic and economic factors (e.g., poverty) or structural bias. Instead, Artiles and Dyson (2005) proposed a scaffold for exploring the intersections of structure, sociology, and economics within systems. They described three dimensions within systems that require analysis: the participant, cultural, and outcomes dimensions. Because of the interplay between power differentials and regulative functions, community cultures fluctuate between friction and cohesion. Indeed, people use their agency to navigate situations and interactions applying the regulative rules of their cultural communities, but also improvising in response to other participants and the goals of the activity arenas in which they find themselves (Cole, 1996). This view of systems offers a multidimensional perspective in which activities are mediated through several continuously operating exchanges that transform policy in unanticipated ways. This perspective has particular merit as we examine educational practices and policies in light of the ongoing dilemma of disproportionality. It offers new possibilities for embedding social justice narratives within complex systems.

In NCCREST we used a conceptual framework for examining the work of students, teachers, and schools to organize our engagement with partner districts. Central to this work were our efforts to help SEAs reconceptualize their core work as learning for, in and about practice that is designed for culturally responsivity (Klingner et al, 2005). Through networks, we engaged leadership in (a) learning more about their own practice using participatory action research, (b) participating in a set of linked learning opportunities that explore both how teams work together and for what purposes, (c) designing and implementing change initiatives focused on issues that emerged from their own needs analyses, and (d) provided tools for them to change practice over time. As importantly, what we learned from this work was used to build tools for SEAs across the country.

The most powerful impact of this effort has been the delivery of on-line products that help SEAs and LEAs build their own capacity for change. Our constant communication with people in the field, the learning that came from our work in systems has led to our conclusion that the work of change lies in the hands of people working within their unique contexts at the school and district level. Technical assistance centers like NCCREST provide just-in-time information that can inform, influence, and support the change that occurs locally. A second critical aspect of our success was our capacity to provide data in formats that helped people understand that their local contexts were not necessarily representative of the nation as whole or even other systems within their states. This understanding propelled change since leaders became increasingly cognizant of local layers of complexity that needed to be understood and changed in order for transformative practices and policies to anchor forward movement.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: GPRA

Outcomes
The following table details outcomes of the NCCRESt project organized by OSEP GPRA Program Measures. Project specific performance measures are clustered by the relevant OSEP program measures. The percentages reported reflect the degree to which a specific performance measure was accomplished. Each performance measure requires the delivery of a tangible product or service. Therefore percentages reflect percentages of completion based on frequency counts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OSEP Program Measures</th>
<th>Performance Measures</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<tr>
<td>#1 The extent to which projects provide high</td>
<td>Develop a template for data analysis on a state-by-state basis to determine the level of compliance with section 618(c) of IDEA.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>NCCRESt staff developed and used a template for analyzing state by state compliance with section 618(c). Using this template we completed 4 annual analyses of IDEA Annual Performance Report (APR) Section 618(c) for 50 states and six territories. These findings were presented annually at national conferences. Contributed to the development of an Annual Progress report Technical Assistance Manual.</td>
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<td>Develop a web-based, sensitive and responsive continuous improvement cycle for each participating SEAs that provides accurate baselines, and the basis for analyzing and interpreting the data collected on representation of minorities in special education and informs SEAs and LEAs about the impact of implementing culturally competent practices in reading, behavior and early intervention and progress in achieving improvements.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>NCCRESt, along with the National Institute for Urban School Improvement (NIUSI), developed an interactive data website that offered a continuous improvement cycle to help states and school districts examine their special education data. At this website, more than 100 interactive GIS Maps portraying disproportionality across 10 years of OSEP data (ideadata.org) along with tables and trend graphs present the distributions of students with disabilities across various disability categories by ethnic/racial category and teacher qualifications to help practitioners and policy makers at the local and state levels understand their own status in relationship to disproportionate representation in special education. It is currently possible for all 50 states to view data on this website in the form of maps, tables, and data-trend analyses. These longitudinal data have allowed the project to evaluate changes over time and participate in both continuous improvement activities with states as well as improve NCCRESt performance.</td>
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Develop accurate baselines & analyze the impact of change efforts on student referral, placement and outcomes for students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds in participating sites.

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<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Accurate baseline data on disproportionality were expressed on the website using two calculations for every state. In addition, states were divided into categories based on the racial composition of each state to examine equity issues between and among states based on their census data. This allowed NCCRESSt personnel to examine how relationships between policy, cultural and linguistic histories and current practices impacted state policies and local district implementation of indicators 9 and 10 on the APR. In doing so, the project staff were able to engage in analysis and planning that helped states redirect resources for technical assistance and professional learning to improve the status of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. As a result, annual changes in the placement and performance of students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds were tracked at the state level.</td>
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<td>Assist SEAs in developing a plan to address disproportionality that focuses on widespread screening, and effective early intervention, reading, and behavioral programs.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>NCCRESSt has worked directly with 44/50 states offering technical assistance to support the states in developing state technical assistance and professional development plans for addressing disproportionality within their states. NCCRESSt held three national forums on disproportionality that received a mean score of 4.8 (out of 5) on participant satisfaction: (a) English Language interventions, (b) understanding the dilemmas of disproportionality, and (c) systemic approaches to eliminating the causes of disproportionality. The second two were self-funded through participant registration. Participants ranged from 100 in</td>
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<td>OSEP Program Measures</td>
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<td>Engage sites in examining patterns in the impact of change efforts.</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>49 States and Territories participated in regional technical assistance meetings led by NCCRESt in which teams from each state and territory were invited to send teams to attend, to learn about disproportionality, and to develop a technical assistance plan that identified their needs, plans for action, and evaluation. As a result of these activities, we worked with representatives of 56 states and territories. NCCRESt held Regional Technical Assistance Meetings in the Northeast, Mid-South, Great Lakes, Mountain Plains, and Southeast Regions throughout its first two years. Additionally, NCCRESt co-hosted regional forums on Disproportionality in Denver, CO and a conference on Addressing Disproportionality in Sacramento, CA. Teams from states located in each region participated in the events, which focused on developing technical assistance plans to reduce disproportionality in special education and close the achievement gap. Activities included looking at data, mapping assets, identifying needs, developing action plans, and planning evaluations. These plans have been posted on the NCCRESt website, and team members are invited to begin accessing the site and working within the PLP to edit, revise, or begin conversations around these emerging plans. NCCRESt collects evaluation data at each meeting that is used to refine technical assistance as well as meeting processes.</td>
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<td>Evaluate impact of change efforts on stakeholders and organizations.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>The NCCRESt office conducted telephone interviews with State Directors of Special Education. The interviews provided an opportunity to learn how each state is defining disproportionality and addressing the data collection, analysis and planning requirements of 618(c). The dialogue with directors has also afforded NCCRESt the opportunity to</td>
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propose new or enhanced ways of approaching compliance.

As a result of those phone interviews, NCCRESt added an additional deliverable to its list. It issued an RFP to encourage work with states that had made the political and economic commitment to focus intensely on the reduction of disproportionality. Nine states were selected from a total of 18 applications: Connecticut, Iowa, Louisiana, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. Within the first year, due to changes in the State Department, Iowa dropped out of the work. State teams met with NCCRESt four times each year to develop, assess, and refine their implementation work.

In addition, NCCRESt provided specific technical assistance to each state based on their needs. For instance, the Connecticut Case Study came out of NCCRESt's work with that state. The tool provided information both to Connecticut and to other states about how districts approach and deal with disproportionality given their local contexts, capacities, and knowledge bases. New Jersey asked for technical assistance related to computing indices for identifying disproportionality. North Carolina received technical assistance in the form of the design and implementation of annual, state-wide conferences that highlighted how teacher identity, local cultures impact the way that local districts receive and implement Federal policy. Ohio enlisted NCCRESt personnel to work on their principal leadership efforts. Tennessee partnered with NCCRESt to develop its state plan, highlight districts that were improving, and involved NCCRESt staff in three statewide conferences. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction involved NCCRESt at the state, regional, and local levels to adapt the NCCRESt rubric to its state context, help district teams learn to use the rubric, provide ongoing professional learning to teams from local districts, and help design and refine a statewide professional learning initiative.

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<th>#2 The rele</th>
<th>A comparison among states on the following issues: To what extent are state special education</th>
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<td>Eight state profiles along with our annual APR analyses help to paint the picture of the ways in which federal policy traveled to states and local districts. While NCCRESt created a strong, national understanding of the issue of disproportionality, our data show</td>
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eligibility requirements showing evidence of change to include both “large differences from typical levels of performance in one or more domains AND with evidence of insufficient response to high quality interventions in the relevant domains of functioning in school settings.” (NRC, 2002)

To what extent are states’ special education implementation guidelines informing and supporting the use of “noncategorical conceptions and classification criteria that focus on matching a student’s specific needs to an intervention strategy.” In addition, are they encouraging a decrease in “the need for the traditional high incidence disability labels such as learning disability (LD) and emotional disturbance (ED)?” Or, if traditional disability definitions are still being used, to what extent are they being revised “to focus on behaviors directly related to classroom and school learning and behavior (e.g., reading failure, math failure, persistent inattention, and disorganization)” (NRC, 2002).

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<td>eligibility requirements showing evidence of change to include both “large differences from typical levels of performance in one or more domains AND with evidence of insufficient response to high quality interventions in the relevant domains of functioning in school settings.” (NRC, 2002)</td>
<td>that about 15 states worked consistently across time to deal with the root causes of disproportionality. And, another set of states were early adopters of RTI and Positive Behavior Supports. In some but not all cases, these initiatives were linked conceptually in the minds of stakeholders. In many other cases, these initiatives gained momentum within states because of the educational and experiential backgrounds of individuals at the state level and influential local leaders, political will and interest on the part of state legislatures. In these situations, links between RTI, disproportionality, and Positive behavior supports were not made, although as momentum built, these three issues buttressed one another to inform and accelerate local adoption.</td>
<td>Design, develop and maintain a technology infrastructure for the Center based on the strategic cycle for policy and practice dissemination.</td>
<td>100% A technology infrastructure for the center was developed. It included web-based tools that were developed and prepared for use by SEAs. The tools included three powerful learning environments: an online group space or Campus, a portfolio-based learning and action research planner or PLP, and a data site. These three tools were completed during the first three quarters of the first year of the project. The tools have been shared with all of the states at the RRC meetings and with various leadership groups within NCCRESSt, and important first level documents (such as initial plans and templates for future reports) have been uploaded to each state’s site.</td>
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Each state has a generic login name and password that can serve as a public access to that state's team efforts. In addition, each individual member of a state team has a private login for higher level privacy and work access. The link to the three tools are all housed on the NCCRESst homepage, which then takes any state member or public member of a state team to the campus where those people can then find the PLP and data site. Other links available in the campus or group work space include a discussion area for private within-state talks, a resource collection unique to that state, and a state directory to facilitate team communications.

PLP

The portfolio, or PLP, for each state includes four distinct tool areas: Plans, Artifacts, Checklists, and Portfolios. The planning area includes the standards against which to measure state progress, a survey and general input tool to facilitate collection and documentation of baseline and change-over-time information, and a goal setting tool that allows the articulation of the broad outlines of an action plan that can be linked to the standards for tracking of the goal's relationship to other goals within a larger systemic effort. The artifacts area has tools for creating folders to hold work, an area for creating and documenting work and receiving feedback on the work, including the use of rubrics developed to help embody the standards. Work can be uploaded by any member of the state team and other members as well as project advisors and experts can leave discussion documents and comments on the work. The checklists area displays the relationship of goals and artifacts to the standards. The portfolios area allows a state team to create several collections of artifacts for various audiences, and to publish those collections for public review if desired.

Use the Center's technology infrastructure to collaborate with institutions of higher education, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic, Tribal, 100% NCCRESst collaborated with Institutions of Higher Education. Many professionals at institutions of higher education, and specifically those at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and Hispanic, Tribal, and other minority-serving institutions were a critical dissemination and networking target of NCCRESst. They were on the NCCRESst
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<td>and other minority-serving institutions, and recipients of State Improvement and Teacher Quality Enhancement grants to prepare teachers who implement scientifically based early intervention, reading, behavioral, and classroom management practices.</td>
<td>Use a conceptual framework for analyzing and synthesizing available information from empirical research as well as stakeholder perspectives, summarize, synthesize and expand the existing evidence-based practices for educating and supporting students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds for lay, practitioner, scholarly and policy audiences.</td>
<td>News subscription list and received all announcements of events and/or new products, as did recipients of State Improvement and Teacher Quality Enhancement grants. Through the LASER Project at the University of South Florida, NCCRESt connected with LASER scholars housed at HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges. NCCRESt collaborated with The Monarch Center. Alfredo Artiles, an NCCRESt principal investigator, is working with Norma Lopez-Reyna to develop efforts between NCCRESt and the Monarch Center. Monarch received copies of professional development modules and related materials for their work with HBCUs. Monarch staff was invited to NCCRESt state technical assistance meetings to observe its process.</td>
<td>NCCRESt convened several work sessions with other partners to align supports to states, teacher preparation institutions, other technical assistance and dissemination projects, and local education agencies. We worked effectively with Regional Resource Centers to support their regional conferences on disproportionality.</td>
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NCCRESt's goal is to assist practitioners, researchers, and policy makers in coalescing around culturally responsive, evidence-based interventions and strategic improvements in practice and policy to reduce inappropriate referrals to and placement in special education and to help close the achievement gap between culturally and linguistically diverse students and their peers. We envision disproportionality work as cutting across three interrelated domains: policies, practices, and people. Policies include those guidelines enacted at federal, state, district, 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 individuals engage in to navigate and survive in 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...
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<th>Results</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<td>Creation of 3000 item metatagged, online library.</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Additionally, NCCRESt has created an informational library that is available online. A priority for our Professional Development Core Team has been the acquisition, indexing, and updating of this metatag library. The metatag library has over 3000 entries. We assigned key descriptors to each entry based on the conceptual framework model so that it can be tagged to our surveys and other resources on education reform. The library database contains helpful annotated resources (journal articles, books, book chapters, technical reports, etc.). These resources were categorized using the framework which allows researchers, educators, scholars and other browsers to find research based evidence and discussions supporting the systemic change framework. This framework has been maintained and web visitors can now download or use a shopping cart to purchase at cost print materials from the NCCRESt project.</td>
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<td>Products and working papers on various topics related to the intersection of race, ethnicity, culture and ability and the practice of special education.</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>NCCRESt publications included the monthly electronic newsletter NCCRESt News and the quarterly online journal NCCRESt Quarterly. Publications called NCCRESt Briefs (including research briefs, practitioner briefs, and parent briefs) are posted on the website and publicized via press releases following the strategic networking and dissemination plan. There are 12 NCCRESt Practitioner Briefs, publications that focus on pertinent issues including: Disproportionate Representation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Special Education, Racial Disproportionality in School Disciplinary Practices, Preventing Disproportionate Representation, Becoming Culturally Responsive Educators, Addressing Diversity in Schools, Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction, Addressing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students (Guidelines for Parents), The Overrepresentation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Special Education (Legal Rights). 16 papers resulted from the English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities: Emergent Research Conference sponsored by NCCRESt. One set of papers was published in the Journal of Learning Disabilities (Klingner &amp; Artiles, Guest Editors), and a second set published in Educational Researcher. The American Education Research Association has recently approved a volume of chapters that address aspects of</td>
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</table>
Produce a series of products grounded in the work of participating SEA and LEA achievements and positions linked to the existing and ongoing databases, research syntheses, and currently funded projects.

100%


NCCRESt principal investigators published 20 refereed journal articles that examined disproportionality and its attendant intersections and discords.


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<td></td>
<td><a href="http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n38/">http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n38/</a></td>
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Leverage the continued improvement of schools in high minority LEAs through state technical assistance plans, collaborative work with existing technical assistance networks, local asset mapping, continuous school improvement processes in regional, state & local leadership academies that focus on early intervention, reading, and behavioral programs. 100%

The NCCRESt data site allows state team members to access a wide variety of publicly available information on teacher quality, disproportionality, and other special education information. The site integrates information and data from IDEA, USDOE, Office of Civil Rights, and the US Census, making data easier to find and display. As the project helps uncover the various elements that converge to create local and state level conditions in which students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds may be disproportionately represented, the data maps and tables become more complex. A leadership locator helps users find and communicate with project team leaders in research, technical assistance and at the national levels of the project.

An introductory presentation about the disproportionality maps assists users in understanding and using the site. Interactive maps and tables on the site present the distributions of students with disabilities across various disability categories by
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<td>ethnic/racial category and teacher qualifications to help practitioners and policy makers at the local and state levels understand their own status in relationship to disproportionate representation in special education.</td>
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<td>Maps and tables are available by state as well as by some key cities. The key cities maps illustrate what districts can do to visualize their data at a finer grained level of analysis than is available at the state level. These tables of data are also interactive. That is, users can sort and order columns of information to help see their state data in a variety of contexts. Users can also make choices and then see (or print) trend graphs and comparative histogram graphs at the state level.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Project advisors and external evaluators were presented with and gave feedback about a demonstration of NCCRESt website capabilities. David Gibson, Elizabeth Kozleski and/or Alfredo Artiles have participated in the OSEP/Westat task force on disproportionality formulae, worked with the Center on Focused Monitoring, presented at the annual data managers’ meeting, and presented the website at every regional meeting, in districts and at the annual Clark County Education for the 21st century conference.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Work in Memphis, TN, Madison, WI, Denver, CO, and other key city districts was coordinated and supported by both NIUSI and NCCRESt staff to ensure that work at the state level also was implemented at the local level.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Support knowledge utilization</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>NCCRESt staff works with content experts to develop modules for leadership academies that focus on the four critical foci areas of NCCRESt. Each module has three, 3-hour academies that build on one another in terms of deepening participant knowledge about the content. We focus on building technical expertise, contextual understanding and critical frameworks. In each module, participants build a skill set (the technical aspect), context knowledge that helps guide their use of skills in specific contexts, and a set of critical questions to consider in implementing and evaluating their efforts.</td>
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These academies are developed for professional developers within states to implement in LEAs. Because our view of disproportionality is anchored in daily practices in schools, our academies are designed to be delivered to teams of educators who work together in buildings or in central administrative capacities. The academies assume that changes in practice can be best accomplished when a team of educators with differing roles, expertise and interests come together to focus on building practices that assume that diversity is at the core of educational systems and practices.

Professional Development Modules

Module: 1. Collaborative Leadership Teams
1.1 Fostering team leadership in culturally responsive systems
1.2 Engaging stakeholders in culturally responsive systems
1.3 Creating culturally responsive systems

Module: 2. Collection and Use of Data
2.1 Mining meaningful data
2.2 Identifying school-wide patterns of student performance
2.3 Looking at student work to target instruction

Module: 3. Understanding Culture and Cultural Responsiveness
Related Leadership Academies:
3.1 Appreciating culture & cultural responsiveness
3.2 Uncovering diversity
Develop a strategic cycle for the Center’s products and events that capitalizes on existing meetings and organizational networks through national and regional meetings, in collaboration with other Technical Assistance Centers (including the Elementary and Middle School Technical Assistance Center), Federal Resource Center, Regional Educational Laboratories, Regional Resource

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<td>3.3 Spotlighting issues of power &amp; privilege to create change</td>
<td>Module: 4. Culturally Responsive Literacy</td>
<td>Related Leadership Academies:</td>
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<td>4.1 Literacy for What?</td>
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<td>4.2 Culturally responsive literacy instruction: What does it look like in the classroom?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>4.3 Boundary crossings- Creating language experiences in the classroom for All students</td>
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<td>Module: 5. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practice</td>
<td>Related Leadership Academies:</td>
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<td>5.1 Understanding cultural responsiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>5.2 Culturally responsive classrooms</td>
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<td>5.3 Culturally responsive curriculum</td>
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<td>Module: 6. Culturally Responsive Response to Intervention Framework</td>
<td>Related Leadership Academies:</td>
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<td>6.1 Overview of culturally responsive response to intervention</td>
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<td>6.2 Using data to assess student progress &amp; inform educational decisions</td>
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<td>6.3 Ensuring culturally responsive student supports</td>
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NCCRES developed and sustained a strategic dissemination cycle for products and events that connected project-specific events, product releases, and professional learning to the TA & D network events, existing research, policy, practice events. For instance, the Western RRC and NCCRES hosted a disproportionality meeting in Denver, Colorado with 62 participants representing state departments in the Western and Mountain Plains regions. NCCRES hosted a Tele-Seminar entitled Disproportionality is NOT a Special Education Issue: Linking General Ed and Special Ed to Close the Achievement Gap with 70 participants. NCCRES PIs and Staff participated annually in an average of 60 Invited Conference and Workshop Presentations. NCCRES hosted an
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<td>Centers, Equity Assistance Centers, and Clearinghouses.</td>
<td>On-Line Discussion on STILL SEPARATE, STILL UNEQUAL: Special Education &amp; Brown vs. Board of Education, 1954 with 25 participants. In addition, NCCRESt staff regularly attended and participated in local, regional, and national meetings with OSEP, NASDSE, WESTAT, Monarch, Laser, NCEO &amp; other partners. NCCRESt staff participated in 27 meetings of the disproportionality workgroup with the Regional Resource Centers and Project Forum. NCCRESt hosted the Hosted the National Research Conference: English Language Learners Struggling to Learn: Emergent Research on Linguistic Differences and Learning Disabilities. NCCRESt collected evaluation data at all meetings and events to evaluate the quality of the technical assistance and to inform project processes.</td>
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<th>#5 Cost per unit of technical assistance by category</th>
<th>Technical Assistance will comprise about 50% of the budget.</th>
<th>100%</th>
<th>The total costs associated with personnel time, travel, follow-up, and individualized material development was approximately $1.5 million of this budget.</th>
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<td>Product Development will comprise about 20% of the budget.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Costs associated with product development included personnel time, graphic design, editing, and metatagging the library accounted for about $670,000 over the project life.</td>
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<td>Dissemination will comprise about 20% of the budget.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Efforts around dissemination including the development and implementation of a marketing plan, the development and ongoing implementation of eNews, other forms of constant contact, conference dissemination comprised about a fifth of the total budget. These efforts yielded a strong and persistent audience for NCCRESt that crested at about 15,000 users.</td>
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<td>Continuous Improvement will comprise about 6% of the budget.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Our continuous improvement efforts that included monitoring state progress, making data available, and monitoring our own efficacy and results comprised about 6% of the total budget at about $200,000.</td>
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<td>Technology will comprise about 7% of the budget.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Technology cost about $250,000 to develop and maintain an active, data rich website that produced as many as 500,000 hits.</td>
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<td>#7 Developing</td>
<td>Develop 3 to 5 models of technical assistance that are used within at least</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>NCCRESt developed five models for technical assistance that are requested weekly even now, seven months after the end of the project. They included the following:</td>
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<td>1. The Connecticut Case Study. A case study in which two different school districts in</td>
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<td>models</td>
<td>25 states</td>
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<td>Connecticut were studied to understand how the district’s disproportionality data were reduced.</td>
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2. *The Mississippi Cultural Responsivity Matrix - A Teachers' Self-study Guide for Culturally Responsive Practices in Grades K-6: Reading*. Based on James Banks’ work on multicultural education, a team of researchers prepared a tool that is used widely to review the cultural responsivity of reading curricula to ensure that both representation and content of reading stories offer opportunities for identification and connection with characters and narratives to enhance student engagement and increase persistence in reading.

3. *Preventing DISPROPORTIONALITY by Strengthening District Policies and Procedures — An Assessment and Strategic Planning Process*. This tool or an adaptation is used by almost every state to assist districts in understanding the underlying causes of their identified disproportionality data.

4. *Technical Assistance and Professional Development Planning Guide*. This guide is designed to help districts and states identify needs for TA and PD based on student performance outcomes, select strategies and tactics that are closely linked to evidence based practices, and identify a set of deliverables along with groups, organizations, and internal teams that will have responsibility for accomplishing, measuring, and assessing outcomes.

5. *Equity in Special Education Placement: A School Self-Assessment Guide for Culturally Responsive Practice*. This model is designed to guide schools through their self-analysis of their equity outcomes. Designed to survey staff and families, the equity self-assessment assists schools to look critically at the assumptions that undergird the way they interpret student and family cultures and needs to afford opportunities to learn more about their students, understand more completely what they offer to the school environment, and help teachers to link curricula to student histories, experiences, and languages.
APPENDIX B: NCCREST PRODUCTS
NCCREST PRODUCTS

ART POSTERS – CREATED BY YOUTH AROUND THE UNITED STATES
40 Posters

CORE PRINCIPLES
1. Addressing the Disproportionate Representation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Special Education through Culturally Responsive Education

ELL DVD SET
1. Background Issues
2. Population Issues
3. Referral Issues
4. Assessment Issues
5. Assessment Issues
6. Instructional Issues
7. Future Directions

EXEMPLARS
1. Exemplar- Living the Dream in the Promised Land: Features of Highly Successful Schools that Serve Students of Color
2. Exemplar – Proactive Culturally Responsive Discipline
3. Exemplar – Si Se Puede

NCCREST PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MODULES
1. Collaborative Leadership Teams
2. Collection and Use of Evidence
3. Culturally Responsive Literacy
4. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practice
5. Culturally Responsive Response to Intervention
6. Understanding Culture and Cultural Responsiveness

PRACTITIONER BRIEFS
1. A Cultural, Linguistic, and Ecological Framework for Response to Intervention with English Language Learners
2. Addressing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students: Overrepresentation in Special Education: Guidelines for Parents
3. Addressing Diversity in Schools: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
4. Becoming Culturally Responsive Educators: Rethinking Teacher Education Pedagogy
5. Building Collaboration Between Schools and Parents of English Language Learners: Transcending Barriers, Creating Opportunities
6. Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction
7. Disproportionate Representation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Special Education: Measuring the Problem
8. Haciendo Frente a la Sobrerrepresentacion de los estudiantes de origen culturalmente diverso en la education especial: Pautas para los padres
9. Legal Rights: The Overrepresentation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Special Education
10. Preventing Disproportionate Representation: Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Prereferral Interventions
11. Professional Learning for Culturally Responsive Teaching

STATE PROFILES – EFFORTS TO CREATE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

1. New Jersey
2. North Carolina
3. Connecticut
4. Ohio
5. Tennessee
6. Wisconsin

TOOLS AND ASSESSMENTS

1. Connecticut Case Study Report
2. Mississippi Cultural Responsivity Matrix
3. Rubric for Looking at District Practice
4. Technical Assistance Planning Tool
5. DVDs of 2004 National Research Conference Presentations about ELL Issues, Set of 7