Misidentification of Minority Youth in Special Education
Quick Facts



Minority students are often inappropriately labeled as "disabled."

- In 29 states, Black students are more than twice as likely as White students to be labeled with an emotional and behavioral disorder. In 39 states, Black students are more than twice as likely to be labeled as mentally retarded. Ten states have mental retardation identification rates for Native American children that are twice those of White children.[1]

Once labeled as disabled, minority students are disproportionately excluded from the regular education classroom.

- Among students with disabilities, Black youths are twice as likely as White youths to be educated in a substantially separate educational setting (where 60 percent of the day is spent out of school).[2]
- Black and Latino children are significantly less likely than White children to receive special education services as mainstreamed students in an "inclusive" classroom.[3]

Minority students with disabilities face harsher discipline than their White peers.

- During the 1999-2000 school year, Black students with disabilities were more than three times as likely as Whites to be given short-term suspensions. Similarly, they were nearly three times more likely than White students to be removed from school for more than ten days.[4]
- Black, Latino and Native American youths with disabilities were 67 percent more likely than White children to be removed on grounds of dangerousness by a hearing officer.[5]
- When removed from the classroom, Black and Latino youths with disabilities were between two and four times more likely to be educated in correctional facilities than White youths who were removed from the classroom.[6]
- Studies show that restrictive placements result in minority special education receiving unequal services.[7]

The effect of this treatment is extremely harmful to minority youths.

- Twice as many Black students identified as having emotional and behavioral disorders drop out of school (58.2 percent) compared to those who graduate (27.5 percent).[8]
- 75 percent of Black students with disabilities, compared to 47 percent of White students with disabilities, are not employed two years out of school.[9]
- 40 percent of Black youths with disabilities are arrested after leaving high school compared to 27 percent of White youths with disabilities. [10]

---

[1] D. Osher, A. E. Sims and D. Woodruff, "Schools Make a Difference: The Overrepresentation of African-American Youth in Special Education and the Juvenile Justice System," *Racial Inequality in Special Education*, Losen and Orfield, Eds. (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2002).
[2] James W. Conroy and Edward Garcia Fierros, "Double Jeopardy: An Exploration of Restrictiveness and Race in Special Education," *Racial Inequality in Special Education*, Losen and Orfield, Eds. (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2002).
[3] *Ibid*.
[4] *Supra* note 1.

For further information, please contact Jill Morningstar, Co-Director of the Education and Youth Development Division, at (202) 662-3574 or jmorningstar@childrensdefense.org.

[5] *Ibid*.
[6] Calculations based on the December 1, 1999, Count, updated as of August 30, 2001, U.S. Department of Education, OSEP Data Analysis System (DANS).
[7] J. B. Crockett and J. M. Kauffman *The Least Restrictive Environmemnt: Its Origins and Interpretations in Special Education* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999).
[8] *Supra* note 1.
[9] Al M. Best, Martha J. Coutinho and Donald P. Oswald, "Community and School Predictors of Overrepresentation of Minority Children in Special Education," *Racial Inequality in Special Education,* Losen and Orfield, Eds. (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2002).
[10] *Supra* note 1.

For further information, please contact Jill Morningstar, Co-Director of the Education and Youth Development Division, at (202) 662-3574 or jmorningstar@childrensdefense.org.