# M2: Equity and the IDEA

## Course

Introduction to Special Education

## Location

Module 2

## Alignments

### Course Outcomes

CLO II: Identify the 13 disability categories recognized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

### Module Outcomes

MLO 2.1: Explain common student characteristics, strengths, and needs for the 13 major categories of disability.

### Specific InTASC Standards

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| **InTASC** | **Type** | **Specific Standard** |
| 1h | Disposition | The teacher respects learners’ differing strengths and needs and is committed to using this information to further each learner’s development. |
| 2h | Knowledge | The teacher understands students with exceptional needs, including those associated with disabilities and giftedness, and knows how to use strategies and resources to address these needs. |

## Activity Instructions

### Purpose

The history of special education services in American education reveals many discriminatory practices that have affected students’ ability to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). In an effort to shed light on possible inequities in special education, [Part B, Section 1418 (d), of IDEA](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-ii/1418/d) requires states to collect data to determine whether there is disproportionality by race/ethnicity in students who are identified to receive special education services. It is important that educators are aware of how disproportionality occurs, what effects it can have on their students, and what measures might be taken to address any disproportionalities. In this activity, you will use the interactive tool that the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has created to analyze this data and consider its implications for students.

### Task

Read an article about racial disparities in special education programs, then use the Hand in Hand for OSEP Fast Facts tool to explore existing racial disparities in special education. Responding to provided prompts, contribute to a class discussion about the current state of disproportionality and how future educators should approach this issue in their future professional practice.

#### Instructor Preparation for Activity

* **Choose your format.** This activity can be conducted as a face-to-face classroom learning experience, used as an asynchronous discussion board, or structured as a synchronous online activity using breakout rooms.
* **Provide advance access.** Ensure that students have links to the necessary elements for the activity:
	+ Articles:
		- Part I: [Equity in IDEA: Why racial disparities are increasing in special ed programs](https://k12dive.com/news/Schools-examine-racial-disparities-in-special-education/688716/)
		- Part II: [Equity in IDEA: Finding solutions to racial disproportionality in special ed](https://www.k12dive.com/news/equity-in-idea-finding-solutions-racial-disproportionality-special-ed/688717/)
	+ Data: [OSEP Fast Facts: Race and Ethnicity of Children with Disabilities Served under IDEA Part B](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/osep-fast-facts-race-and-ethnicity-of-children-with-disabilities-served-under-idea-part-b/)
	+ Tool: [Hand In Hand for OSEP Fast Facts: Race and Ethnicity of Children with Disabilities Served under IDEA Part B](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/hand-in-hand-for-osep-fast-facts-race-and-ethnicity-of-children-with-disabilities-served-under-idea-part-b/)
	+ [Prompts](#_Prompts): choose from the options listed below, or write your own
* Provide instructions in writing and verbally for how to conduct this activity.
	+ If this is a synchronous activity, explain how long they will have to complete each step.
	+ If this is an asynchronous activity, provide guidance on length, format of response (what tool to use, options to submit in writing or video, etc.), and what criteria you will use to assess their submissions (if you opt to grade the activity).
* Model what you are asking students to do (there is an [example](#_Example) below that you can use).
* Invite questions from the students to ensure they feel prepared to complete the activity.

#### Student Directions

1. Read the provided articles on your own, prior to participating in this activity.
	1. Part I: [Equity in IDEA: Why racial disparities are increasing in special ed programs](https://k12dive.com/news/Schools-examine-racial-disparities-in-special-education/688716/)
	2. Part II: [Equity in IDEA: Finding solutions to racial disproportionality in special ed](https://www.k12dive.com/news/equity-in-idea-finding-solutions-racial-disproportionality-special-ed/688717/)
2. Open the [OSEP Fast Facts: Race and Ethnicity of Children with Disabilities Served under IDEA Part B](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/osep-fast-facts-race-and-ethnicity-of-children-with-disabilities-served-under-idea-part-b/) and the [Hand In Hand for OSEP Fast Facts: Race and Ethnicity of Children with Disabilities Served under IDEA Part B](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/hand-in-hand-for-osep-fast-facts-race-and-ethnicity-of-children-with-disabilities-served-under-idea-part-b/) supplemental tool.
3. Using the Hand in Hand tool, explore the data provided about race and ethnicity of children with disabilities receiving special education services under the IDEA. Be sure you explore the data specific to your state, and pick one other state’s data to explore as a comparison.
4. Choose at least one of the additional readings provided in the Hand in Hand tool and explore the topic in that reading.
5. Respond to the prompts provided by your instructor and share those responses with the larger class.

### Prompts

* What surprised you about the data you encountered? What data was consistent with your expectations?
* How did the data differ between your state and the other state you chose?
* What might be some of the reasons for any disparities by race that you saw in the data? Draw on the Equity in IDEA article, the further reading you chose from the Hand in Hand Tool, or other resources to suggest reasons.
* Based on what you have learned about your state’s disparities, what might be some ways your state could address these disparities?
* Imagine that you are a special education teacher in your state. What are some professional choices you could personally make to address these disparities?
* Once you have heard from others in the class:
	+ Did other students interpret data in a different way from you? How, if at all, does this affect your own analysis?
	+ What resources did other students draw from that you might find useful in forming your perspective on these disparities?

### Example

* Using the first set of guiding questions in the Hand in Hand tool, I see the percentages of all students by race and comparing them to the percentages of students served under the IDEA.
	+ I notice that the percentage of Black or African American students receiving services are higher than their overall national percentage of students.
	+ I notice that the Black or African American students make up a proportionately much higher percentage of students receiving services under the Emotional Disturbance category (22.98%, compared to 13.79% overall).
* I decide to explore the further reading resource about [children identified with emotional disturbance](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/osep-fast-facts-children-IDed-Emotional-Disturbance-20) to learn more. I start with a state comparison.
	+ In Minnesota, 13.41% of all students receiving services under IDEA are identified with the Emotional Disturbance category.
	+ In Vermont, though, 17.36% of students receiving services under IDEA are identified with the Emotional Disturbance category.
	+ Now I’m curious: what is the percentage of all students in each state that are Black or African American?
		- I asked an AI tool to help me find a reliable source for this data.
		- A [2018 report from the Vermont Department of Education](https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-state-board-item-j-2-11_20_19.pdf) said in a 2018 report that 2% of students were Black or African American.
		- The [Minnesota Department of Education](https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/groups/educ/documents/basic/bwrl/mdg3/~edisp/mde087765.pdf) says 12.9% of students were Black or African American in 2018-19.
		- I conclude that there is significantly less disproportionality in Minnesota than in Vermont for this category.
* The further reading I chose states that students identified under the Emotional Disturbance category were more likely to drop out and less likely to graduate in comparison with all students receiving services. They’re also more likely to be served in a separate school or classroom than students with disabilities overall, and they’re significantly more likely to experience a disciplinary removal. Males make up almost ¾ of all students identified under this category.
* I would guess, based on this data, that Black male students in Vermont experience disproportionality, getting overidentified as having an emotional disturbance. This seems to put them at risk for experiencing the right to Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) due to having a higher chance for disciplinary removal, and it could reduce their chances of graduating.
* As a state, maybe Vermont could dive deeper into the data to see if particular school districts have more or less disproportionality. They could also evaluate referral and assessment processes.
* As a special education teacher in Vermont, I might want to explore and advocate for [restorative justice](https://www.edweek.org/leadership/restorative-justice-in-schools-explained/2024/05#:~:text=Under%20a%20restorative%20justice%20model,or%20stigmatizing%20them%2C%20Payne%20said.) practices to see if they reduce the disparities in my school. I also might ask for external review of my assessment practices to see if there are ways I can reduce the potential for bias in my results.