

Disproportionality Self-Study Overview & Instructions

Part 1 – School Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Background

Disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education has emerged as one of our educational system's greatest challenges. IDEA 2004 identified this as one of three monitoring priorities for our nation. Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may be especially at risk for inappropriate identification. However, the focus is on creating a system that accurately addresses the needs of *all students*. Developing a culturally responsive educational system district-wide will have positive outcomes for *all* students and will ensure the identification for special education of only those *who truly have a disability*.

Research indicates several factors that may contribute to misidentification ranging from inappropriate or inadequate instruction to discrepant disciplinary practices to flawed assessment practices. Because the problem occurs for multiple reasons and exists at all levels of the educational system, remedying it requires a multi-faceted approach. The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) has framed a culturally responsive model that is multi-dimensional in scope, designed to (a) increase the use of prevention and early intervention strategies, (b) create contexts conducive to educational systems improvement, and (c) enhance the teaching and learning of practitioners and students alike. This tool is based on instruments developed by preeminent research centers and professional groups.

Domains

The self-assessment guide provides a framework for evaluating (a) knowledge, (b) skills, and (c) dispositions across five domains relevant to addressing the needs of student from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds:

- 1. School Governance, Organization, Policy, and Climate** - the general operation and structure of the school, including policies and reforms associated with school governance, as well as attitudes and perceptions prevalent in the school.
- 2. Family Involvement** - the extent to which families communicate with and participate in their children's school and are perceived to be valued partners by the school.
- 3. Curriculum** - the content and skills included in educational programs.
- 4. Organization of Learning** - the activities involved in the exchange of knowledge in the classroom, including the teaching and learning process, classroom achievement and assessment, and behavior management.
- 5. Special Education Referral Process and Programs** - the delivery of services involving pre-referral and referral processes, eligibility, placement, and instructional programming.

Selecting Buildings to Participate in the Questionnaire

The District's Self-Study Facilitator, in conjunction with the Superintendent or designee, should select schools to participate in the school self-assessment questionnaire (guidelines are below).

- a. **Non-high, Small, and Medium districts** (2,000 or fewer total students) – should include all school buildings.
- b. **Large districts** (2,001 to 10,000 total students) – should include at least 4 elementary schools, 1 middle/junior high school, and 1 high school. If the district has less than 4 elementary schools, all elementary schools should be included.
- c. **Extra Large districts** (more than 10,000 total students) – should include at least:
 - 8 elementary schools (or $\frac{1}{3}$ of the district's elementary schools, whichever is larger),
 - 2 middle/junior high schools, and
 - 2 high schools.

When selecting buildings to participate in the self-study questionnaire, districts should consider the following:

- Referral rates – which buildings generate larger numbers of initial special education referrals, especially referrals of students from racial/ethnic group(s) over-represented in special education?
- Suspension/expulsion rates – which buildings have higher percentages of students suspended/expelled for more than 10 days?
- Statewide assessment performance – which buildings are struggling the most with helping students meet proficiency on the statewide assessment?
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) placement rates – which buildings have larger percentages of special education students placed in more restrictive settings?
- Graduation & dropout rates – which high school is facing the greatest challenge with keeping students in school?

Completing the Questionnaire

The District Facilitator should meet with the Principal (or designee) from each school building selected to participate. This can be accomplished in one group meeting or through individual meetings with each principal. The Facilitator should provide each Principal with: (1) a copy of this document, which includes the parameters for questionnaire participation (see below); (2) the **Self-Study Checklist**, and (3) the following electronic (Excel) documents:

- **Individual Questionnaire**
- **Building Questionnaire Summary**
- **Building Student Demographics Form**

Each Principal (or designee) should appoint a Team Lead for the building. Typically the Team Lead would be the Principal or Assistant Principal, but may be assigned to a school counselor, special education coordinator, or other individual as determined appropriate by the building administrator.

The Team Lead, along with the Principal, should select individuals to participate as members of the School Assessment Team (see recommended and optional members below). *Note - In order to help*

make this process manageable, OSPI recommends limiting the number of participants on the School Assessment Team to fewer than 20 individuals. (Recommended number of participants: 8 to 12.)

a. **Recommended –**

- Building administrator (principal or assistant principal)
- General education teachers – at least one from each grade level (elementary) or at least one from each subject area (secondary)
- Special education teacher – at least one (if the building has one)
- Title or LAP teacher – at least one (if the building has one)
- ESL/ELL teacher – at least one (if the building has one)

b. **Optional –**

- Counselors and school psychologists
- Related services staff (such as SLPs, OTs, specialists, etc.)
- Parents (preferably representative of the ethnic group(s) that is over-represented)
- Students (secondary level only, preferably representative of the ethnic group(s) that is over-represented)
- Community members
- Paraeducators
- Other individuals whom the school building determines appropriate

The Team Lead should meet with the members of the identified Assessment Team to review the questionnaire and the process for completion, identify data and/or sources of information to help with completing the questionnaire, and review the timelines for completion. The Team Lead should provide each member of the team with a hard copy of the ***Building Student Demographics Form*** and an electronic copy of the ***Individual Questionnaire***.

Using the electronic ***Individual Questionnaire*** (Excel document), each member of the Assessment Team should complete the questionnaire (which takes approximately 30 to 45 minutes) and return it to the Team Lead. Instructions for completing the questionnaire are included in the questionnaire document.

Completing the Building and District Summaries

Using the ***Building Questionnaire Summary*** (Excel document), the Team Lead should complete a summary of the building's questionnaire results, and submit it to the District Facilitator. Instructions for completing the building summary are included in the Excel document.

The District Facilitator should collect the building summaries from all participating schools and use the summaries to compile the results and calculate aggregate district scores. The district summary is prepared by District Facilitator using the ***District Questionnaire Summary*** (Excel document with instructions included).

Both of these summary documents will automatically calculate the results of the questionnaires – very little input is required.

Part 2 - Special Education File Review

The school district should conduct a special education file review as part of the self-study process. Basic guidelines for selecting the file sample include the following:

1. The recommended number of files to review depends upon the district's size:
 - a. **Small and Non-High** districts (500 or fewer total students) should review 5 files;
 - b. **Medium** districts (501 to 2,000 total students) should review 10 files;
 - c. **Large** districts (2,001 to 10,000 total students) should review 15 files; and
 - d. **Extra-Large** districts (more than 10,000 total students) should review 20 files.
2. The sample should include only students who were initially found eligible by your district within the last three years.
3. The sample should include students from those racial/ethnic groups that are over-represented in special education (indicator 9) or specific disability categories (indicator 10) for your district. To see your district's data profile, visit <http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/Data/default.aspx>
4. To the maximum extent possible, the sample should include files from a variety of grade levels and schools.

The district's special education director, along with a team of professionals appointed by the director, should conduct the review (minimum of two reviewers, recommended maximum of ten). Suggested team members include: school psychologists, special education teachers, curriculum director, other district administrators, other certificated staff (SLPs, OTs, PTs), etc. The actual process used for conducting the review, including the size and composition of the review team, is left to the district's discretion.

Instructions and templates for selecting files and completing the file review are found on the ***Disp Self-Study File Review*** (Excel) document.