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## Programmatic Equity

*It is one thing to take as a given that approximately 70 percent of an entering high school freshman class will not attend college, but to assign a particular child to a curriculum designed for that 70 percent closes off for that child the opportunity to attend college.*

—James Coleman

The second component area of the equity audit is *programmatic equity*. In this area we will be focusing on the quality of the educational programs (i.e., instructional settings) into which students are placed or from which they are excluded. Though it may make many of us educators uncomfortable to admit it, there are huge variations in quality among different programs within the same schools (see Schoenfeld, 2002, for an excellent discussion of differences in quality of math programs). Among different student groups within schools, there are also typically systematic differences in access to programs.

Obviously, there are a great variety of programs in most schools, so the number of *potential* indicators in this component of the equity audit is quite large. However, in order to stick with a manageable set of four indicators for each category, we've selected four key program areas that research consistently has shown to be likely sites for inequity. These four are (a) special education, (b) gifted and talented education (G/T), (c) bilingual education, and (d) student discipline.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

The over-assignment of students from certain groups, particularly African American males, to special education has long been recognized as a problem of gross inequity with U.S. schools (Artiles, 1998; Losen & Orfield, 2002; MacMillan & Reschy, 1998). Though recognition of the problem has existed for decades, the patterns of high placement rates for African Americans, particularly boys, in special education generally and in certain, severe disability categories such as mental retardation and emotionally disturbed, specifically, continue to the present day.

Additionally, the current U.S. policy context of high-stakes accountability systems complicates the problem by increasing the pressure on educators to raise student performance for all groups. There is concern that this pressure may encourage over-identification of students for special education in order to qualify them for special testing (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2000; Townsend, 2002).

The question to be addressed for this indicator of the equity audit, then, is do the participation rates in special education for various groups of students on an individual campus match the overall proportional representation of these same groups in the school population as a whole? Table 5.1 shows real 2007 data for a Texas school and illustrates large inequity in special education placement rates.

In this example school, not only are African American students *over*-represented in special education at 158% of what would be proportional to their representation in the overall student population, Hispanic students are *under*represented by almost one third of what would be proportional. Both these situations are potentially problematic for the

<i>Student Group</i>	<i>Percentage of School Population</i>	<i>Percentage of Special Education Population</i>	<i>Difference</i>
African American	24	38	+14
Hispanic	42	30	-12
White	34	32	-2

school. Students in one group (African American) may be being placed in special education inappropriately, and students in the other group (Hispanic) may not be receiving special education services that they might legitimately qualify for and need.

## **GIFTED AND TALENTED**

The problem of too many students from certain groups receiving placement in special education settings is reversed in the area of gifted and talented education (G/T) (Ford & Harmon, 2001). Specifically, students from low-income homes and students of color are identified as gifted and talented at rates far lower than their proportional representation in the general student population. This pattern is prevalent in schools and school districts across the United States. Thus, the indicator for the equity audit in the G/T area is whether or not students from all groups are served through G/T in percentages appropriate to their group's representation in the school. In other words, if 30% of students at a particular campus are African American students, then 30% of students identified and served through the gifted and talented program should be African American.

Table 5.2 shows actual data for the entire state of Texas for the 2004–2005 school year for placement in G/T programs, disaggregated by race. It is clear to see from the statewide data (highly likely to be mirrored on most individual campuses) that African American and Hispanic students are greatly underrepresented in G/T classes, while white students and Asian students are overrepresented. Native American students are the only student group that is close to proportional representation. This is an inequity pattern that is a substantial hindrance to the removal of achievement gaps.

## **BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

The third area under programmatic equity considered by the equity audit is bilingual education (or English as a Second Language, or English for Speakers of Other Languages). This is an important area to consider under programmatic equity because ever-increasing numbers of students whose home language is not English enroll in U.S. schools each year. Regrettably, our schools do not have a very good track record

**Table 5.2 Texas K–8, 2004–2005, Identified Gifted/Talented by Race/Ethnicity**

<i>Race/ Ethnicity</i>	<i>Number Enrolled</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Population</i>	<i>Number of Identified G/T</i>	<i>Percentage of Total G/T Population</i>	<i>Percentage Difference Between Total Population and G/T Population</i>
Native American	9,971	0.33	645	0.29	–0.04
Asian	88,796	3	13,494	6	+3
African American	415,980	14	19,372	9	–5
Anglo	1,103,979	37	113,352	51	+14
Hispanic	1,360,536	46	74,761	34	–12
Total	2,979,262	100.33	221,624	100.29	

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2005.

in terms of providing quality education for English language learners. Bilingual programs all too often have been low-expectation settings into which students were segregated where they did not learn English at the level needed for on-grade-level academic progress and where they did not progress in their first language either (Moll, 1992).

In response to this typical situation in bilingual education, states have begun reporting accountability data separately for students served through bilingual education or other programs designed for students learning English. Typical measures in this include reporting of state achievement test data separately for English language learners, test data for achievement tests given in home languages (e.g., Spanish), and sometimes measures of progress toward mastery of English.

As Black and Valenzuela (2003) pointed out, however, caution is in order in selecting and evaluating data about bilingual programs. In other words, learning English should not be the only legitimate outcome of bilingual programs. Equally important are program goals such as proficiency and literacy in students’ home languages and valuing and preserving students’ home cultures. In fact, local school administrators reported using a variety of data sources to evaluate and make decisions about the effectiveness of bilingual programs in research conducted by Gates and Lichtenberg (2005). These measures are shown in Box 5.1.

**BOX 5.1****Data Sources Used to Evaluate Bilingual Education Programs**

- State achievement test
- Oral language testing
- English norm-referenced testing
- Spanish norm-referenced testing
- Retention rates
- High school status of “on track to graduate”
- Student socioeconomic status (SES)
- Attendance
- Student mobility
- Student discipline
- Report card grades

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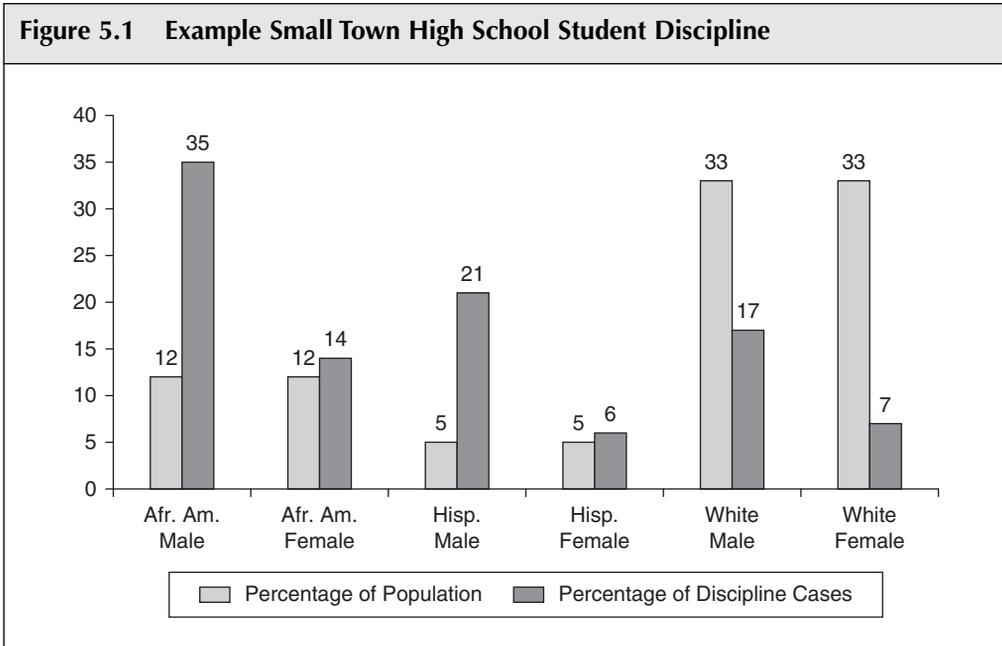
*Source:* Gates & Lichtenberg, 2005.

**DISCIPLINE**

The fourth area under programmatic equity focused on by the equity audit is discipline. Though this may seem somewhat odd when considered alongside the other three areas (special education, gifted and talented education, and bilingual education), it is nonetheless a critically important area. The reason discipline is such an important area to consider in the equity audit is that students who are involved in the discipline system at their schools are frequently removed from their regular classes and do not have the same access to learning as their peers who are not considered “discipline problems.” We would argue that, for some students (particularly African American and Latino boys), the disciplinary settings on their campuses become their instructional placement since that is where they spend most of their time.

To illustrate, Figure 5.1 shows actual disciplinary data for a high school of 1,300 students. At this school, African American males received disciplinary action (in all categories from minor infractions to expulsion combined) at a rate that is nearly *three times* the rate that would be proportional with their representation in the general school population. For Latino boys, the rate is *more than four times* what would be proportional.

Clearly, this high school has serious inequity in its disciplinary actions, as equity audits of many schools nationwide also would show



to be the case (Bowman, 2003; Gregory, 1995). As a result of this inequitable situation, African American and Latino boys at this school spend much less time in their regular classrooms, and thus, have differential opportunities to learn the curriculum.

## CHAPTER CONCLUSION

We have presented four programmatic equity areas—special education, gifted and talented education, bilingual education, and discipline—that we suggest as key indicators to be considered by educators conducting equity audits of their schools. We understand that many educators might want to argue that the inequities in these areas are somehow produced by nature or by society and that we educators can do little to change them. We would and are arguing just the opposite—that these inequities are in large part produced by the systems in place in our schools. It is our attitudes, assumptions, and practices that produce the data we see in these areas, and those things are all within our control and can be changed. Furthermore, we have changed these things ourselves as practitioners; we have students in our classes who are changing them in their schools; and we have

studied schools as researchers that have changed them. The first step in all of these changes for all of these people has been a willingness to face the current situation of inequity and to accept ownership of the problem (see Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Walk through the halls of your campus and through the areas where students wait for disciplinary action and to which they are assigned discipline consequences. Based just on your observations, do you think the students who are outside of their regular classes for disciplinary reasons are representative of your school's general pupil population? If you asked a colleague to conduct a similar walk around focused on the same question, do you think she or he would reach the same conclusion that you did? What would an equity audit of this indicator likely show for your school?
2. Do you know the procedures for identifying students as G/T at your school? If not, obtain a copy of the guidelines for identification, service, and exit for G/T students at your campus. Review these procedures in light of what an equity audit for your campus in this area would likely reveal.
3. If your school assembled a team to conduct an equity audit for your school, would you include students on the team? If so, why? If not, why not? At what age might students be able to contribute significantly as part of an equity audit team? Who else do you think should be involved—parents, community members, support staff, business leaders?