



# School Climate and Special Education - Disproportionality Self-Assessment Tool

## Background and Purpose

Alaska's diverse population of students poses unique challenges in ensuring that every student receives an appropriate and equitable education. School districts around the state often struggle with student underachievement, dropout, and excessive special education referrals and placements. The problem of disproportionate representation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in special education has emerged as one of the system's most critical challenges, occurring for reasons ranging from inappropriate or inadequate instruction to flawed assessment practices. Because the problem occurs for multiple reasons and exists at all levels of the educational system, remedying it requires a multifaceted approach.

The Alaska Department of Education has designed this cultural assessment tool to help districts reflect on intervention and child find practices within their districts and schools that are in need of reform. The Alaska Department of Education thanks the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) for their original model which has informed the framing of our tool. More information from the NCCRESt can be found at [www.nccrest.org](http://www.nccrest.org).

## Directions

The Alaska Special Education Cultural Assessment Tool is divided into five sections. **Section 1: Assessment Team and Desired Outcomes** defines the assessment team and provides space to set expectations and/or desired outcomes. **Section 2: Data Review** provides a space to reflect on the district's or school's current student demographic data. This data review is designed to use current demographic data that can be pulled from the OASIS count to focus in on racial and ethnic backgrounds with higher rates of referral to special education. These rates can then be expressed as areas of interest or concern, and can be considered when completing the self assessment questionnaire. Alternative to this short data analysis, EED's yearly disproportionality report can be used to establish populations of interest or concern. A district may wish to conduct additional analyses to determine if the identified issues are located in specific schools. **Section 3: Self Assessment** is divided into nine core areas of self assessment questions. Each question is scored on a scale of 3 to NA, with the highest level 3 meaning the activity 'almost always' happens and the lowest level 'na' meaning this question is not applicable. Each core area's scores are totaled at the end of the area. Total scores are then transferred to **Section 4: Scoring** for analysis. Scoring for each area is completed by putting in the total score and dividing it by the total possible, revealing a percentage of general effectiveness in each area, as well as a total score of overall effectiveness of school/district climate in addressing issues of intervention and child find practice. Finally, **Section 5: Plan of Action** presents a framework for school or districts to articulate needs and to frame a plan of action to address those needs.

This tool is but one of many means for districts to self assess their ability to equitably provide education for all students in their school. A broader listing of resources is included in the final pages of this document for further investigation.

## Section 1: Assessment Team and Desired Outcomes

**Name of school or district:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Assessment Team:

NOTE: A panel of 5 to 10 people from diverse backgrounds is recommended, including principals, representative teachers and community members.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

6) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

7) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

8) \_\_\_\_\_

4) \_\_\_\_\_

9) \_\_\_\_\_

5) \_\_\_\_\_

10) \_\_\_\_\_

### School/District's Desired Outcomes from Self Assessment:

➤ \_\_\_\_\_

➤ \_\_\_\_\_

➤ \_\_\_\_\_

➤ \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 2: Data Review

<b><i>Student Demographics</i></b>								
	American Indian / Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multiple Races / Ethnicities	Pacific Islander	White	Totals
1) The number of children from each ethnic or racial background in my school/district (total population).								
2) The percentage of each race or ethnicity in the total school/district population. (Line 1 ÷ Total of line 1)	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	100 %
3) The number of children from each race or ethnicity in special education.								
4) Of the students receiving special education services, <u>the percent from each ethnic or racial group.</u> (Line 3 ÷ total of line 3)	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	100 %
5) Of the number of students from each ethnic or racial group, <u>the percent of each group receiving special education services.</u> (Line 3 ÷ Line 1)	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	--N/A--

**Area(s) of interest or concern:** (include any areas identified in your analysis and all areas identified by the state in your disproportionality report)

- From Question 4, of the students receiving special education services, are there any ethnic or racial groups with a high representation? \_\_\_\_\_
- From Question 5, are there any ethnic or racial groups with a high representation in special education? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 3: Self Assessment**

**School/District Governance, Organization and Policy**

		Almost Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Almost Never	Not Applicable
1	Administration, faculty and support personnel are well informed of the influence of culture, language, and ethnicity on school/district achievement.	3	2	1	0	n/a
2	The administration works collaboratively with all the members of the school community to ensure equitable treatment for all students.	3	2	1	0	n/a
3	The administration provides opportunities for professional development of faculty and support personnel on issues of cultural, language, and ethnic diversity.	3	2	1	0	n/a
4	The administration ensures that the special education assessment process is conducted fairly and appropriately.	3	2	1	0	n/a
6	The administration creates a school/district culture in which students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds feel they are listened to, their opinions valued, and they are involved in decision-making.	3	2	1	0	n/a
7	The administration exemplifies a positive attitude towards the school, teachers, students, and families.	3	2	1	0	n/a
8	The administration provides support and encouragement for participation in extra-curricular activities by students from diverse cultural, language, ethnic, and ability groups.	3	2	1	0	n/a
9	Administration, faculty and support personnel remain informed about current school/district	3	2	1	0	n/a

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	policies and reforms that impact the delivery of services to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.					
10	The school/district ensures that all policies and reforms are explained to parents in their language through written communication and various meetings held at times convenient to parents (with childcare, and translators provided, and parents involved in the planning).	3	2	1	0	n/a
11	The school/district involves families and the community in the formation of new school/district policies.	3	2	1	0	n/a
12	New reforms are implemented with sensitivity toward the diverse learning needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.	3	2	1	0	n/a

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

## School/District Climate

		Almost Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Almost Never	Not Applicable
1	The school/district ensures that all policies and reforms are explained to parents in their native language through written communication and various meetings held at times convenient to parents (with childcare, and translators provided, and parents involved in the planning).	3	2	1	0	n/a
2	The school/district involves families and the community in the formation of new school/district policies.	3	2	1	0	n/a
3	New reforms are implemented with sensitivity toward the diverse learning needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.	3	2	1	0	n/a
4	The school/district accepts the responsibility for the achievement of all students.	3	2	1	0	n/a
5	The school/district sponsors professionally conducted workshops where faculty and support personnel can identify their cultural and/or linguistic biases and work to address them.	3	2	1	0	n/a
6	The school/district establishes school and district-wide professional development training in cultural competence (that focuses on the ability to interact meaningfully and respectfully with individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds).	3	2	1	0	n/a
7	The school/district remains knowledgeable about their students' culture and community by visiting students in their home environment.	3	2	1	0	n/a
8	The school/district collaborates with the community, universities and other relevant institutions to assist in developing standards for addressing the needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families.	3	2	1	0	n/a

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

## Family Involvement

		Almost Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Almost Never	Not Applicable
1	The school/district has developed an effective ongoing communication system with families.	3	2	1	0	n/a
2	The school/district provides professional development to staff and teachers on effective communication with parents from diverse cultural, language, and ethnic groups.	3	2	1	0	n/a
3	The school/district is a welcoming environment for families from diverse backgrounds.	3	2	1	0	n/a
4	The school/district surveys families from diverse backgrounds to gather suggestions on ways to involve parents in their children's education.	3	2	1	0	n/a
5	The school/district provides adequate information to parents about pre-referral intervention in the native language of the home.	3	2	1	0	n/a
6	The school/district recruits and maintains a resource list of culturally competent staff and community contacts who can communicate effectively with parents from diverse cultural, ethnic, and language groups.	3	2	1	0	n/a
7	The school/district involves families in the pre-referral intervention process as respected partners and ensures they are well-informed at all times.	3	2	1	0	n/a
8	The school/district assists families in understanding their rights and available services under IDEA by providing one-on-one counseling, as well as workshops and/or referrals to advocates.	3	2	1	0	n/a
9	The school/district has an established plan for following up on parent conferences regarding request for services or other parental concerns.	3	2	1	0	n/a
10	The school/district utilizes parent liaisons to help parents and students navigate the school system.	3	2	1	0	n/a
11	The school/district involves parents in the governance of the school/district.	3	2	1	0	n/a
12	The school/district provides childcare, transportation, or alternate meeting days and times if needed.	3	2	1	0	n/a

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

## Curriculum

		Almost Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Almost Never	Not Applicable
1	The curriculum fosters respect and understanding for diverse cultures by providing materials that help students develop positive attitudes toward different racial, ethnic, cultural, language, and ability groups.	3	2	1	0	n/a
2	The curriculum supports and values the experiences and information students have learned within their cultural groups.	3	2	1	0	n/a

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3	The curriculum helps students make connections between what they are learning in school and their personal experiences.	3	2	1	0	n/a
4	The curriculum situates specific cultural and local knowledge in a global context.	3	2	1	0	n/a
5	The curriculum explicitly teaches cultural capital (the norms, behaviors, and attitudes) that provides access to achievement.	3	2	1	0	n/a
6	The curriculum uses the local language and cultural knowledge (funds of knowledge) as a foundation for the rest of the curriculum.	3	2	1	0	n/a

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

Teaching and Learning						
		Almost Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Almost Never	Not Applicable
1	Teachers understand the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture, language and social class interact to influence student behavior.	3	2	1	0	n/a
2	Teachers are knowledgeable about the history and cultures of diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural groups.	3	2	1	0	n/a
3	Teachers are knowledgeable about individual learning styles.	3	2	1	0	n/a
4	Teachers are knowledgeable about the second language acquisition process and how to support students who are English language learners.	3	2	1	0	n/a
5	Teachers modify their instruction so that students from diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, language, and ability groups will have an equal opportunity to learn.	3	2	1	0	n/a
6	Teachers keep accurate records of each student's progress.	3	2	1	0	n/a
7	Teachers relate content and instructional strategies to the cultural background of their students.	3	2	1	0	n/a
8	Teachers utilize instructional materials that reflect images and perspectives from diverse groups.	3	2	1	0	n/a
9	Teachers help students to appreciate current and historical events from multiple perspectives.	3	2	1	0	n/a
10	Teachers help to organize activities and projects that enable students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups work together.	3	2	1	0	n/a
11	Teachers inform students about stereotyping and other related biases that have negative effects on racial and ethnic relations.	3	2	1	0	n/a
12	Teachers have high expectations for all students regardless of their background or differences.	3	2	1	0	n/a
13	Teachers work from the premise that "all children can learn" and continue to attempt different instructional approaches until each child is reached.	3	2	1	0	n/a

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14	Teachers feel a strong sense of responsibility for all students, including students referred for or already placed in special education.	3	2	1	0	n/a
15	Teachers are experts in instruction and management and know how to effectively challenge and support their students.	3	2	1	0	n/a
16	Teachers are knowledgeable about and skilled in using strategies for teaching English language learners (including sheltered English techniques).	3	2	1	0	n/a

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

## Classroom Assessment and Achievement

		Almost Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Almost Never	Not Applicable
1	Classroom assessment is conducted with fairness and sensitivity towards students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.	3	2	1	0	n/a
2	Teachers use a range of assessment strategies that provide students from diverse backgrounds opportunities to demonstrate their mastery and skills, including the opportunity to share what they know in their native language if they wish.	3	2	1	0	n/a
3	Administrators and teachers use a variety of instruments and strategies to assist students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups in meeting State standards and other mandated requirements.	3	2	1	0	n/a
4	Teachers utilize information from several sources, including families, in assessing students' achievement.	3	2	1	0	n/a
5	The school/district identifies and uses multiple assessment tools and strategies that are research-based and culturally valid.	3	2	1	0	n/a
6	The school/district provides school and district-wide training in the administration of assessment tools and methods that consider the student's cultural background.	3	2	1	0	n/a
7	The school/district knows when and how to provide accommodations to students with special needs and English language learners.	3	2	1	0	n/a
8	The school/district ensures that high stakes tests have been validated for their intended purpose and have been standardized on populations of students similar to their students.	3	2	1	0	n/a

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

## Behavior Management

		Almost Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Almost Never	Not Applicable
1	Administration, teachers, and support personnel are knowledgeable about differences in cultural practices that might impact student behavior.	3	2	1	0	n/a
2	Administration, teachers, and support personnel discipline students with a sensitivity towards students' cultural and linguistic differences.	3	2	1	0	n/a

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3	Classroom rules and procedures are written and explained in language that is clear to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.	3	2	1	0	n/a
4	Teachers are knowledgeable about certain behaviors that are consistent with students' cultural background so as not to consider them deviant.	3	2	1	0	n/a
5	Teachers utilize resource persons belonging to or familiar with a students' cultural and linguistic background to assist in planning behavioral interventions.	3	2	1	0	n/a
6	Students are taught school-sanctioned behaviors, particularly as they might conflict with culturally specific behaviors.	3	2	1	0	n/a
7	Students are made aware of behaviors that might be culturally specific so they can learn how to interact appropriately with students from cultures other than their own.	3	2	1	0	n/a

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

**Special Education Pre-Referral and Referral Process – Classroom Achievement**

		Almost Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Almost Never	Not Applicable
1	School/district personnel are knowledgeable about and able to facilitate a range of meaningful pre-referral strategies.	3	2	1	0	n/a
2	Students have been provided with meaningful, appropriate pre-referral strategies, adequate opportunities to learn, and validation of their difficulties across time and settings.	3	2	1	0	n/a
3	At team meetings sufficient time is devoted to selecting the best strategies for individual students based on data collected by teachers and others prior to the meeting.	3	2	1	0	n/a
4	Pre-referral strategies are varied and substantive, such as transferring a student to another teacher's class or providing individual tutoring through an after-school program.	3	2	1	0	n/a
5	Classes are taught by certified teachers who speak the child's native language.	3	2	1	0	n/a
6	Classroom room size is controlled to ensure an optimal learning environment that addresses the needs of all the students.	3	2	1	0	n/a
7	Specific instructional objectives are developed for each child, and teams specify who is responsible for addressing these objectives and the timeframe in which they are to be monitored.	3	2	1	0	n/a
8	The classroom context ( teaching style, classroom arrangement and management, and peer relationships) from which a child is referred is carefully considered.	3	2	1	0	n/a
9	School/district personnel knowledgeable about cultural and linguistic diversity, including differentiating between second language acquisition and disabilities in the case of English language learners, should be present at the Child Study Team meeting.	3	2	1	0	n/a
10	Parents/Caregivers should be involved as respected, valued partners at every stage of the process.	3	2	1	0	n/a

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

## Special Education Pre-referral and Referral Process - Behavior

		Almost Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Almost Never	Not Applicable
1	Administrators, teachers, and related support personnel are knowledgeable about the special education process.	3	2	1	0	n/a
2	Administrators, teachers, and support personnel are knowledgeable about the evaluation guidelines outlined in the Individual with Disabilities Education Act. (IDEA)	3	2	1	0	n/a
3	Instruction is modified appropriately to facilitate achievement before students are referred for special education evaluation.	3	2	1	0	n/a
4	The student is assessed by someone who speaks his/her native language and who is knowledgeable about the impact of second language acquisition on IQ and achievement.	3	2	1	0	n/a
5	English language learners are assessed in their native language as well as English.	3	2	1	0	n/a
6	In assessment the student is observed in his or her classroom as well as in other contexts and settings.	3	2	1	0	n/a
7	The assessment team uses alternative assessments (curriculum based assessment, portfolio assessment) to assist in determining eligibility for special education.	3	2	1	0	n/a
8	The administration ensures that the assessment team includes a resource person familiar with the student's cultural background.	3	2	1	0	n/a
9	The assessment team utilizes culturally appropriate and culturally valid assessment tools.	3	2	1	0	n/a
10	The school/district assigns personnel who are knowledgeable about student's cultures to conduct assessments.	3	2	1	0	n/a
11	Individualized Education Plans take into consideration the student's cultural and linguistic background.	3	2	1	0	n/a
12	A resource person familiar with the student's cultural and linguistic background assists in the development of interventions and in the monitoring of the student's progress.	3	2	1	0	n/a

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 4: Scoring

1. School/district Governance, Organization, and Policy	/ 33 = ___%	<— weakness — 25% ————— 50% ————— 75% — strength —>
2. School/district Climate	/ 24 = ___%	<— weakness — 25% ————— 50% ————— 75% — strength —>
3. Family Involvement	/ 36 = ___%	<— weakness — 25% ————— 50% ————— 75% — strength —>
4. Curriculum	/ 18 = ___%	<— weakness — 25% ————— 50% ————— 75% — strength —>
5. Teaching and Learning	/ 48 = ___%	<— weakness — 25% ————— 50% ————— 75% — strength —>
6. Classroom Assessment and Achievement	/ 24 = ___%	<— weakness — 25% ————— 50% ————— 75% — strength —>
7. Behavior Management	/ 21 = ___%	<— weakness — 25% ————— 50% ————— 75% — strength —>
8. Special Education Pre-referral & Referral – Classroom Achievement	/ 30 = ___%	<— weakness — 25% ————— 50% ————— 75% — strength —>
9. Special Education Pre-referral & Referral – Behavior	/ 36 = ___%	<— weakness — 25% ————— 50% ————— 75% — strength —>
<b>OVERALL SCORE</b>	<b>/ 270 = ___%</b>	<b>&lt;— weakness — 25% ————— 50% ————— 75% — strength —&gt;</b>

### Our School/District’s Areas of Strength

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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**Our School/District’s Priorities for Change**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 5: Plan of Action**

Area of Need	Desired Outcome	Who is responsible	Needed Resources	Timeline/Activities	Date to Evaluate Progress	Method of Evaluating Progress

## Additional Resources

If your district is at risk for or has disproportionality, there are many resources available to assist you and your schools in analyzing data to determine root causes of and address disproportionality.

- From NYU Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality: <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/tacd>
  - **Equity in Education: Addressing Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education** - This manual is intended to provide school districts with detailed data-driven processes for identifying the root causes of disproportionality in their district and ensure equitable outcomes. A major premise involves understanding **disproportionality as an outcome of policies, practices, and beliefs**. At the end of this data-driven process, school districts will be able to identify policies, practices, and beliefs implicated in their disproportionality patterns and, more importantly, develop systemwide buy-in and perspective of this equity issue.  
<http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter.olde/programs/TACD/documents/Equity%20in%20Education%20Manual%20FINAL%205000.pdf>
  - **Data Analysis Workbook** - This workbook provides step-by-step procedures for school districts to develop their own capacity to measure disproportionality using basic qualitative methods.  
<http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter.olde/index/dataanalysisworkbook.pdf>
- From NCCrest – National Center on Culturally Responsive Education Systems [www.nccrest.org](http://www.nccrest.org)
  - **Preventing DISPROPORTIONALITY by Strengthening District Policies and Procedures** — An Assessment and Strategic Planning Process - [http://www.nccrest.org/PDFs/district\\_rubric.pdf?v\\_document\\_name=District%20Rubric](http://www.nccrest.org/PDFs/district_rubric.pdf?v_document_name=District%20Rubric)
  - **Equity in Special Education Placement: A School Self-Assessment** Guide for Culturally Responsive Practice - [http://www.nccrest.org/publications/assessment.TOOL.formA.pdf?v\\_document\\_name=Assessment%20Tool%20form%20A](http://www.nccrest.org/publications/assessment.TOOL.formA.pdf?v_document_name=Assessment%20Tool%20form%20A)
- **Response to Intervention and the Disproportionate Representation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Special Education** <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/diversity/disproportionaterepresentation>
- The Right IDEA: <http://therightidea.tadnet.org>
- Equity Alliance at Arizona State Univ Learning Carousel: <http://ea.niusileadscape.org/lc>
- Equity Assistance Centers: [www.equityassistancecenters.org](http://www.equityassistancecenters.org)
- National Center on RTI: [www.rti4success.org](http://www.rti4success.org)