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Reducing Inappropriate Special Education Referrals for Historically Underserved Students



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Educators should use a procedure that assures that the present process for submission of special education referrals does not continue to produce the over-representation of historically-underserved students in special education. Without the acceptance of the cultural differences that students bring to the classroom teachers will continue to contribute to this process.

In many cases, a teacher's last resort for helping a student with academic or behavioral deficiencies results in submitting a special education referral. This is an indication that they have reached their limit with the student and are at the brink of giving up on that student. Most students who are referred for special education are tested which often results in the student receiving the referred special education services.

Historically underserved students have verbal and nonverbal behaviors that reflect their culture and are often in opposition to the expectations of administrators and teachers. Teachers and administrators often reject the student's culture and label the students as having academic and behavioral challenges.

Inspired, teachers would benefit from a process that embraces

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the differences in culture that students bring to the school. When the teacher has the advantage of understanding the student's cultural behavior the teacher is more likely to continue to work with the students without submitting a special education referral.

However, without a non-intrusive transformation process the teacher can become the subject of increased oral and written warning, increased teacher classroom observations, and multiple requests

to increase the productivity of their students. Teachers will respond to these strategies which could result in litigation and challenges from union officials.

Since each school has different demographics which results in a different culture for each school, teachers must have the opportunity to use a process that allows them to evaluate the culture of their students without ongoing pressures from parents, administrators, and other stakeholders.

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The process must begin with an administrator and "select" group of teachers. This team will develop academic and disciplinary strategies that respect the culture of the students and the community that they originate from without compromising the culture of the school. Once the strategies are proved valuable the team provides professional development to the entire staff.