

SPECIAL EDUCATION OR SPECIAL PLACEMENT?  
THE OVERREPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the issue of the overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs using information collected by National Household Education Surveys Program in 2007 to find that minorities are overrepresented and inappropriately placed in special education programs.

The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped along the way.

Many thanks,  
Madeline Madrigal

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
DATA AND EMPIRICAL METHODS .....	12
RESULTS .....	17
CONCLUSION.....	20
APPENDIX .....	23
REFERENCES .....	32

## I. INTRODUCTION

Discrimination against minorities has been prevalent in America since its founding. Even today, from the workplace to the classroom, minorities still see discrimination despite laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and bodies such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Despite these measures, there is no policy intervention to ensure that discrimination is mitigated specifically in the special education realm. While the federal government has invested resources under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to ensure that students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) regardless of ability, no policy has been developed to ensure students placed in special education programs meet such programs' eligibility criteria and are not placed in special education as a result of racial/ethnic bias. Discriminatory streaming of minorities into special education as well as the notion that, on average, minority students enter kindergarten/pre-k with lower level skills than their White peers remain hypothesized drivers of the overrepresentation of minorities in special education programs (Farkas, 2003).

Special education programs in the U.S as we currently know them stemmed from parent advocacy groups in the 1950s and 60s. The federal government took action by passing several pieces of legislation such as Training of Professional Personnel Act of 1959, which trained administrators and teachers of children with mental retardation, and the Teachers of the Deaf Act of 1961, which trained personnel for children who were deaf or hard of hearing. While these pieces of legislation began to pave the way for special education programs, not until the Public

Law 94-142 was passed were students with disabilities guaranteed a free appropriate public education (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This law was intended to “improve how children with disabilities were identified and educated, evaluate the success of these efforts, and provide due process protection for children and families” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Several amendments since 1975, such as increasing the attention to early childhood intervention services for children with disabilities in addition to employment and transition programs for adults with disabilities, have shaped what we currently refer to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Despite the legislative attention given to individuals with special needs, issues with the current system have been raised. The Shannon Carter case (Florence County School District IV v. Shannon Carter) illustrated the limitations of IDEA, specifically the Individualized Education Plan, when Shannon Carter’s parents requested Florence County to provide a more intensive curriculum so Shannon would be reading on a high school level when she graduated from high school and the county refused. Additionally, the issue of race/ethnicity has not escaped the realm of special education. A lawsuit was filed in 2008 accusing Lower Merion School District located in Ardmore, Pennsylvania of improperly classifying some African American children as special education students and placed in this curriculum that is not designed for students without special needs. The case is set for trial in November 2011 (“Parents Sue,” 2011). In the 1984 case of Georgia State Conference of Branches of NAACP v. State of Georgia, the latter was accused of discrimination against black children because there were a disproportionate number of black children in classes for low achievers. The court did not find evidence of differential treatment of



Black and White students and explained that overrepresentation of Black students in special education classes is not sufficient to prove discrimination (Georgia State, 1985). The courts' ruling showed that there was insufficient evidence to prove that overrepresentation is enough to justify discrimination.

This paper aims to address the issue of overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs. The Georgia State Conference of Branches of NAACP v. State of Georgia was unable to prove discrimination because the court was unable to associate being Black with placement in special education, holding all other factors constant. If minority students are placed in special education at a higher rate than their non-minority peers, it is possible they are being placed in such programs based on different factors than those used to place non-minority students in special education. The cultural differences related to minority status could also drive behavioral differences not only of students, but of parents as well. For example, lack of parental involvement in a student's education and the reluctance of parents to interact with teachers and administrators may result in their children's lower academic performance and/or behavior that is not the "norm." Based on such behavior teachers may recommend minority students at a higher rate for placement in special education (Soodak, D. M, 1993). Other factors may also be influential, including the financial incentives schools receive from the state for each student placed in special education as well as the fact that placement in special education excludes students from academic performance indicators. MacMillan and Reschly have noted different states have varying standards and categories for special education students and programs (MacMillan and Reschly, 1998). These differences and the absence of federal standards and

categories create inconsistencies across states and suggest conclusions drawn from these data are invalid. Research in the field suggests racial/ethnic minorities are disproportionately placed in special education at a higher rate.

Perhaps other factors such as discrimination are at play when recommending students into special education classes. Students who do not meet the appropriate criteria for placement in special education programs are left at an academic disadvantage because the education they receive from the special education programs are designed to encompass a unique curriculum tailored for students with special needs. Specifically, instruction and interventions are designed to meet the individual needs of each child with a disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This curriculum does not reflect the general education standards that are implemented to ensure students are prepared to excel in higher education such as college or university courses, nor does it prepare students for the workforce. Thus, placement in special education when one does not have a disability and/or meet the criteria for this program engenders a disadvantage at the academic and social welfare level. If the data suggest that placement in special education occurs disproportionately for racial/ethnic minorities, the long-term implications for the minority group are notable. Not only does this disproportionate representation contribute to the achievement gap, but it potentially limits the diversity in higher education, the workforce, and in leadership positions. Without diversity, society suffers from the limitations of our broad perspectives and experiences. With all these issues in mind, the role a student's racial/ethnic background plays in their placement in special education remains to be fully understood.

Special education, more specifically IDEA, was designed to provide students with disabilities a free appropriate public education. Legislators define “appropriate public education” as one where a student’s individual learning needs are accommodated. A child who is placed in the program without meeting the disability criteria may face diminished motivation to academically and even professionally challenge him/herself. Furthermore, the Special Education Expenditure Project concluded that it costs approximately twice as much to educate students in special education as it does to educate students in general education (SEEP, 2004). Despite the costs associated with increased placement in special education, administrators and teachers who are accountable for meeting academic state standards are inadvertently incentivized to place in special education students who might decrease the school’s academic standing, since special education students are not required to take the state standardized assessments. These state standardized assessments are one of the data points used to evaluate teachers and administrators in addition to a factor in how much budget is allocated to the school.

This paper uses data collected by National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) from 2007. NHES administers several surveys, one of which is the *Parent and Family Involvement in Education* survey which collects data on student and parent characteristics and behavior. Most other research in this field utilizes the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRD) used by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. The CRD presents many advantages such as a large sample size and inclusion of all school districts in the sample, ensuring a balance between five different sizes of school districts, and this dataset is repeatedly used by researchers investigating the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. The

Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey provides similar data as the CRD.

However, the data are obtained from the parent/family of the student, while the CRD is collected directly from school districts (US Dept. of Education, 2010). Though CRD is the generally used dataset in this research field, I thought it would be interesting to utilize a different dataset that provided similar information. I selected the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey administered by the NHES to diversify the source of information typically used in this field of research, which may potentially bolster findings and provide additional justification for policy recommendations. I used these data to estimate the probability of being placed in special education depending on whether the student is a racial/ethnic minority. I find that the probability of being placed in special education is higher when the student is a racial/ethnic minority. In utilizing a different dataset, I strive to add to the understanding of this issue by illustrating that even when using a different, more recent dataset minorities are still overrepresented in special education. While the CRD provides trustworthy, reliable data, expanding the sources of data will strengthen findings that could, in turn, influence policy recommendations.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section II relates this paper to previous research, Section III discusses the data and empirical methods used in this paper, Section IV describes the regression estimates of the effects of the being a minority on placement in special education, and Section V provides policy implications and considerations for further research.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The prevalence of minorities in special education is an issue that has been researched by academics and policymakers for the past 40 years. Several studies have tried to determine reasons for this phenomenon in different settings, using various sets of variables, and with different data sets. Amendments since 1975, such as increasing the attention to early childhood intervention services for children with disabilities in addition to employment and transition programs for adults with disabilities, have shaped what we currently refer to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In 1997 Congress amended the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which now requires states to report the “number of students with disabilities by race, ethnicity, and disability category in special and limited English proficient (LEP)” (U.S Department of Education, 2010). This granularity of data was expected to increase the breadth of knowledge and understanding within the special education realm. Specifically, the federal government was concerned with accountability in special education classrooms, ensuring these students are qualified for the programs, and ensuring these students are receiving their free appropriate public education.

In regard to the progress of special education services in the past 25 years, Gottlieb and Alter (1994) found that referral, evaluation, and placement services in inner cities are not any more effective now than they were 25 years ago. The authors suggest that urban schools’ special education programs are increasingly left with the consequences of poor general education curriculum and resources.

In 1998 Oswald et al. studied the representation of African American students in special education controlling for economic, demographic, and educational variables. The environmental factors included were median value of housing, median household income, percentage of children below poverty level, percentage of children enrolled “at risk,” and percentage of adults in the community who had 12<sup>th</sup> grade education or less and no diploma. “[D]emographic variables were found to be significant predictors of identification of students as MMR or SED; when the effects of these variables were controlled for, the likelihood of being identified as MMR or SED was still significantly influenced by ethnicity” (Oswald, et al, 1999). Oswald found that African-American students were approximately 2.4 times more likely to be identified as mildly mentally retarded (MMR) and 1.5 more likely to be identified as seriously emotionally disturbed (SED) than non-African-American students (1999).

In contrast to Oswald, et al., Hosp and Reschly (1998) stressed the importance of including an academic achievement variable in models explaining the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. Using data from the 1998 Civil Rights Compliance Report (OCR), the 2000 Common Core Data (CCD), and district level achievement data, Hosp and Reschly found 8 of their 12 models that accounted for academic variables suggested that variations in academic achievement also contribute to disproportionate representation of racial/ethnic students (Hosp and Reschly, 2004). Hosp and Reschly’s interest in academic achievement variables rather than just economic and demographic factors reflects their notion that research should focus on variables that can be adjusted through teacher/student/school interventions. Their focus on academic achievement variables suggests

that teachers and schools can impact the academic performance of students. It also suggests that students' placement in special education is not fixed and that it can be modified with adjustments to school environments.

Similarly, in 1993, Podell and Soodak investigated the teacher efficacy and bias in special education referrals. Their study indicated that teachers who deem themselves effective do not differentiate students by socioeconomic status (SES), whereas teachers who deem themselves ineffective do not find regular education suitable for underachieving students from low socioeconomic status (SES) families. Also, teachers referred students to special education when learning problems seemed random more often than when problems were attributed to a medical condition. Thus, teachers' referral decisions appeared to be subjective and influenced by factors irrelevant to the academic or cognitive difficulties of the student (Podell and Soodak, 1993). Podell and Soodak's findings about the subjective nature of the referral process support the decision of Hosp and Reschly to include an objective academic achievement variable in their models.

In 1998, MacMillan and Reschly presented a study highlighting the flaws of OCR data.<sup>a</sup> They pointed out that the data reported by the OCR are aggregated from sources that use different methods of reporting a child's race (e.g., a child can only be "one-box" and there is no method to account for biracial children), indicating that a racial/ethnic group may not be captured accurately in the data and ensuing results. Additionally, the authors express concerns

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<sup>a</sup> OCR data had been used in Oswald's 1998 study which found overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs

regarding the range of disability categories defined by each state. These definitions and range of characteristics that qualify a student for a certain category of disability vary across states. The state-by-state variability in the race and disability variables inspired the authors to investigate these variables more carefully and question the validity of the conclusion that minorities are overrepresented in special education. MacMillan and Reschly note, “When these data are aggregated nationally, such variations are obscured and the results of overrepresentation data are rendered hopelessly uninterpretable when considered by specific categories” (p 21). MacMillan and Reschly suggest that until data is standardized across states research will be unable to determine conclusively the factors affecting overrepresentation of minority students in special education.

Environmental potential factors may also influence the racial/ethnic overrepresentation in special education classes. In looking for explanations for overrepresentation of Black students in educable mentally handicapped (EMH) programs, Tamela Eitle (2002) examined the effects of local racial and political-economic structures, school district characteristics, and school desegregation politics. She found that minorities in the school district, economic resources, and Black political resources in the community, in addition to school desegregation politics, are positively associated with the representation of Black students in EMH programs. Eitle concludes that, “These relationships indicate that either those making placement decisions still exercise some discretion in referring and assigning students or the procedures for making decisions are influenced by factors that are associated with, for example, school desegregation politics.”



Several studies have examined discrimination against minorities in general education and the long-term implications this has on the achievement gap. For example, George Farkas (2003) examined racial discrepancies in educational achievement and analyzed any that might be resulting from discrimination, such as lower teacher expectations. The author suggests that minority students experience lower school achievement than White and middle-income students as a result of factors such as lesser school readiness, racially and economically isolated elementary schools (yielding lesser skill development during the elementary school years), and lower expectations of students from all stakeholders. Farkas contends that this leads to placement in lower performing middle and high schools and a less intense path of achievement for minority students. Deere and Strayer studied the impacts of the new Texas accountability policy on the selection of students in special education. Their study detailed evidence indicating an increase in special education placement, especially for minority and lower performing students. Furthermore, after a policy change required scores of special education test takers to be counted, the authors noted a decrease in rate of special education students taking standardized achievement test (Deere and Strayer, 2001).

Considering the aforementioned research influencing not only students in special education, but also general education, it is wise to keep this research in perspective as we analyze the overrepresentation of minorities within the special education realm. Placement in special education when one does not have a disability and/or meet the criteria for this program engenders a disadvantage at the academic and social welfare level. If the data suggest placement

in special education occurs disproportionately for racial/ethnic minorities, the long-term implications for the minority group are notable. Not only does this disproportionate representation contribute to the achievement gap, but it limits the learning prospects of individual students and contributes to less diversity in all higher education and professional realms. Without such diversity society suffers from a limitation perspective; diversity enhances social well-being and mitigates groupthink. With all these issues and ramifications in mind, the role a student's racial/ethnic background plays in their placement in special education remains to be fully understood. I strive to add to the understanding of this issue by illustrating that even when using a different, more recent dataset minorities are still overrepresented in special education. The trustworthiness and reliable nature of the CRD is advantageous for these studies, but expanding the sources of data will bolster findings in the field that could, in turn, influence policy recommendations.

### III. DATA AND EMPIRICAL METHODS

The data used in this paper comes from the 2007 *Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey* conducted by the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES). The advantage of the NHES is that it provides descriptive data on the educational activities of the U.S. population covering all learning ages. The sample for this survey was obtained through a scientific and random selection of all households in the United States using Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) software to obtain data from households sampled by Random Digit

Dialing (RDD) sampling techniques (FedBizOps, 2011). The data collected for this survey is primarily utilized by policymakers, researchers, and educational professionals. . The survey is conducted repeatedly over time to capture trends in the educational landscape. The NHES has been conducted in the springs of 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2007. Various types of surveys were conducted within the NHES. These include Adult Education, Before- and After-School Programs and Activities, Early Childhood Program Participation, Parent and Family Involvement in Education, Civic Involvement, Household Library Use, School Readiness, and School Safety and Discipline. The data utilized for the purpose of this paper comes from the Parent and Family Involvement survey, which was conducted in 1996, 1999, 2003, and most recently in 2007. While the CRD presents many advantages such as a large sample size and inclusion of all school districts in the sample, ensuring a balance between five different sizes of school districts, the NHCS dataset is repeatedly used by researchers investigating the overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

The Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey provides similar data as the CRD. However, the data are obtained from the parent/family of the student, while the CRD is collected directly from school districts (US Dept of Education, 2010). Though CRD is the generally used dataset in this research field, I thought it would be interesting to utilize a different dataset that provided similar information. I selected the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey administered by the NHES to diversify the source of information typically used in this field of research, to potentially bolster findings, and to provide additional justification for policy recommendations.

A limitation of the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey is that it does not include state level or district level data; however it does include regional variables and community type variables (i.e., urban, suburban, etc.). To account for these shortcomings, future research could include parent/family data or district- and state-level controls in addition to the student controls included in my models.

To estimate the influence of being minority on a child's placement of special education, I used three linear probability models. The main equations I estimate are of form:

$$y = \beta_0 + \text{race} * \beta_1 + x \beta_2 + w \beta_3 + z \beta_4 + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

Here,  $y$  is the dummy variable for whether a student is placed in special education or not. The variable of interest is the race/ethnicity variable, where in some equations it will be separated by Black, Hispanic, and Other and in other equations it will be separated as Black/Hisp and Other (where White is the baseline category). The controls are separated into 3 categories: child controls are denoted by  $w$  in the equation, family controls are denoted by  $z$ , and school controls are denoted by  $x$ .

The child controls included in the equations are child's gender, child's age, whether the child speaks English at home, whether the child has behavior problems (three or greater discipline offenses was coded "1," less than three was coded "0"), whether the child has

schoolwork problems (three or greater offenses was coded “1,” less than three was coded “0”), whether the child repeated a grade, and whether the child was born in the U.S. This last variable was included to control for any assimilation variation. I did not include a control for the child’s grade level in school since I controlled for the child’s age. The child’s age is more relevant in special education as a result of the varying learning levels within a grade.

The family controls in the equation include the mother’s education level, which is separated into dummy variables for each level of mother’s education: less than high school diploma, high school graduate, vocational degree or some college, college graduate, and graduate or professional school. The birth mom dummy variable indicates whether the child’s mother is the biological mother or not. The variable indicating whether the mothers speaks English at home or not is included to control for the child’s over- or underexposure to English and the possible ramifications since, in this equation, we are only interested in special education placement, not English as a Second Language placement. Similar to the child controls, a dummy for whether the mother was born in the U.S. was included to control for any assimilation variation. The low-income dummy variable is included to control for the family’s level of income, since being low-income is historically associated with racial/ethnic groups and we are strictly interested in the association between race/ethnicity and special education. Even though *dad* variables are included in the data, substantial number of observations were missing from the dataset; thus the variables were not included in the equations in order to maintain a large enough sample size. The large number of missing “dad” observations may suggest those are single family homes, indicating other challenges to the child which could impact their academic

achievement and perhaps influence their placement in special education if strict criteria are not used to ensure students indeed are in need of special education services.

The school controls in the equation include dummy variables for the size of the school by enrollment: small (under 599), medium (600-999), and large (1000 or greater). The poverty dummy indicates whether the school is in a zip code with high poverty (greater than 10%), and the high minority population dummy indicates whether the school is in a zip code with a high minority population (greater than 16%). The community type control variables are dummy variables indicating whether the school is located in a city, suburb, or rural community.

The first equation is designed to test for an association between race/ethnicity and placement in special education while holding the aforementioned variables constant. In equation two, I tested for an association between race/ethnicity and whether the child has a disability. Thus the dependent variable is different from equation one. This was included in the analysis to compare the strength of the association in the two equations. Assuming there is no overrepresentation, these associations should be of approximately equal magnitude. In equation three, the sample is limited to students who have a disability and it tests the association between those students' race/ethnicity and placement in special education. Comparing these results to the results in equation two will allow me to presume with some certainty whether minorities are placed in special education because they are more likely to have a disability or as a result of subjective factors. All of these regressions were run twice, once with Blacks and Hispanics grouped together (BlackHisp) and once with all the race/ethnic groups separated.

#### IV. RESULTS

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Data details the means and sample size of the variables used in my equations. The overall mean of the *Special Education* variable is 0.282, while the mean of the White sample is 0.260, of the Black 0.349, Hispanic 0.320, and of the BlackHispanic sample 0.332. In simply comparing the mean, we note that the Black mean is the highest, followed by the Hispanic mean, then the White mean. As a binary variable a higher mean indicates that more of the observations in the sample were counted “1” (i.e., yes, student is placed in special education); thus, in this sample approximately 35% of Black students are in special education. Though we are unable to conclude anything regarding overrepresentation with this data, it gives us a general idea of the distribution of the variables. In regards to the *Disability* variable, the overall mean of the sample is 0.231, while the mean of the White sample is 0.246, of the Black 0.206, Hispanic 0.197, and of the BlackHispanic sample 0.200. Here it is interesting to compare the means of the *Special Education* variable to those of the *Disability* variable. Whites have the highest mean for the *Disability* variable, followed by Blacks and then Hispanics. Reviewing the following tables will allow us to draw some conclusions.

Table 2 includes the full sample and reports results from regressions of placement in special education on race/ethnicity when controlling for various variables. Column 1 groups Blacks and Hispanics in the same category while estimating the probability of being in special education, while Column 2 separates these racial/ethnic groups. In column 1, where Blacks and Hispanics are grouped, being an underrepresented minority (Black/Hispanic) is associated with a

0.029 greater probability than their White peers of being placed in special education (p-value: 0.264) and most of the child controls are statistically significant. However, as noted in column 2, being Black is associated with a 0.048 greater probability than their White peers of being placed in special education (p-value: 0.192) and being Hispanic is associated with a 0.014 greater probability than their White peers of being placed in special education (p-value: 0.669). Thus, the Black component is driving the magnitude of the Black/Hispanic variable, but the Hispanic component is impacting the statistical significance.

Table 3 includes the full sample. But rather than using *Special Education* as the dependent variable, *Disability* is used as the dependent variable. Running the same linear probability model with *Disability* as the dependent variable yields statistically significant effects of the variables of interest. In Column 1, where Blacks and Hispanics are grouped, being an underrepresented minority (Black/Hispanic) is associated with a 0.035 decreased probability of having a disability compared to their White peers (p-value < 0.000). In column 2 where race/ethnicity is reported separately, being Black is associated, on average, with a 0.078 decreased probability compared to their White peers of having a disability (p-value < 0.000) and being Hispanic is associated with 0.016 decreased probability compared to their White peers probability of having a disability (p-value: 0.913). Here the Black component is driving the statistical significance and magnitude of the Black/Hispanic variable. Since the coefficient is negative, I infer that Blacks and Hispanic have a lower probability than their White peers of being coded as having a disability.



Table 4 includes the same regression as in Table 2 but with the sample limited to children who have a disability. Being an underrepresented minority (Black/Hisp) is associated with a 0.021 greater probability than Whites of being placed Special Education (p-value: 0.433). In column 2 where the race/ethnicity are reported separately, Blacks have a 0.042 greater probability than Whites, on average, of being placed in special education (p-value: 0.295) and Hispanic students have a 0.042 greater probability than White students of being placed in special education (p-value: 0.895). These results are not statistically significant at any conventional level.

Despite the aforementioned lack of statistical significance, the difference in direction of magnitude of the coefficients in Table 4 compared to the coefficients in Table 3 suggest there is some discrepancy in placing students in special education. Appropriate placement in special education is based on a student meeting the criteria of having a disability in addition to needing accommodations to achieve learning goals. From Table 3, we see that compared to their White peers, Black/Hisp students have a lower probability of having a disability, yet in Table 4 we see they have a higher probability than Whites of being placed in special education conditional on having a disability. However, other factors that were not controlled for in the equation may be at play. Such factors may include using subjective criteria to place students in special education, bias, lack of understanding cultural learning differences, and lack of parent involvement in the special education referral process.

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper finds that Blacks and Hispanics, on average, have a higher probability of being placed in special education compared to their White peers.<sup>b</sup> Additionally, the results indicate that Blacks and Hispanics have a lower probability, on average, than their White peers of being coded as having a disability, but a higher probability, on average, than their White peers of having a disability *and* being placed in special education, holding the aforementioned child, family and community variables constant. These findings suggest other subjective criteria may be used to place Black and Hispanic students in special education. Whether they are placed in special education as a result of discrimination, bias, or lack of proper training/understanding of the placement criteria is yet to be determined. Nonetheless, just as parent advocacy groups brought attention to individuals with disabilities in the 1950s, it is our responsibility as policymakers and analysts to shed light on the inappropriate placement of minorities in special education programs.

While the Office of Civil Rights helps protect individuals from discrimination based on race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex (gender), or religion; providing protection to students who are inappropriately placed in special education may be difficult since disproportionate placement in special education is difficult to prove in a court, as seen in the Georgia State Conference of Branches of NAACP v. State of Georgia case. Thus, other interventions should be implemented to ensure students are properly placed in special education

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<sup>b</sup> Note: while minorities are found to be overrepresented, these findings are not statistically significant.

programs. Such interventions include federal, rather than state, criteria for placement in special education programs. This would enable a nationwide understanding of what students qualify for special education. Stronger oversight of special education classrooms, such as a state or district representative or even an independent third party visiting and assessing students who are being referred for special education or who are currently in the program, would create another checkpoint to ensure students are qualified for special education services. Advocating parental involvement could also alleviate some inappropriate placement; while parent involvement continues to be a struggle, especially for minority students whose parents oftentimes work multiple jobs, new strategies such as involvement through mobile communication, text, or social media may prove effective. Other options would be designing more rigorous standards by which special education students are assessed and using these standards to assess teachers and administrators. This would alleviate the incentives teachers and administrators inadvertently face as a result of special education students' exclusion from state standardized assessments.

While the debate about discrimination against minorities will likely continue, it is the responsibility of government officials to rectify overrepresentation of minorities in special education. The long-term ramifications of minorities' overrepresentation in special education should not be overlooked. The resources and curriculum of special education are not adequate for a student who does not have a disability qualifying them for special education. As a result, those students inappropriately placed in special education do not have the opportunities that a general education may provide them such as more challenging career prospects. This, in turn,

could potentially perpetuate the achievement gap and stifle the individual learning prospects of these students.

While the research links the overrepresentation of minorities in special education with the inappropriate placement of these students, the results also shed light on the research opportunity for government officials to understand the drivers of this overrepresentation. Future research could add to analysis and understanding of the drivers of minority overrepresentation in special education. Additional studies could include parent/family data, district- and state-level controls, and the student controls included in my models. With these new findings and knowledge, government officials could develop policy interventions not only to mitigate overrepresentation of minorities in special education but also to alleviate the long-term ramifications to minorities and the larger impact on society's welfare.

APPENDIX

**Table 1: Summary Statistics of Data***Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey*

	Variable	Overall (1)	White (2)	Black (3)	Hispanic (4)	BlackHisp (5)
<i>Child Controls</i>	Special Education	0.282	0.260	0.349	0.320	0.332
	N	2530	1672	249	387	636
	Disability	0.231	0.246	0.206	0.197	0.200
	N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189
	Male	0.515	0.517	0.515	0.511	0.512
	N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189
	Age	12.589	12.749	12.829	12.035	12.323
	N	10669	6557	1153	2030	3183
	EngChldHome	0.933	0.992	0.995	0.712	0.814
	N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189
BehavProbs	0.0719	0.073	0.087	0.062	0.071	
N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189	
ShlWrkProbs	0.081	0.088	0.076	0.065	0.069	
N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189	
ChldReptGrd	0.086	0.071	0.166	0.095	0.121	
N	10370	6338	1141	1993	3134	
ChldUSborn	0.944	0.982	0.972	0.841	0.888	
N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3134	
<i>Family Controls</i>	Momeduc < high sch	0.078	0.026	0.080	0.257	0.193
	N	10287	6328	1100	1970	3070
	Momeduc =high sch	0.234	0.214	0.280	0.296	0.290
	N	10287	6328	1100	1970	3070
	Momeduc some col	0.305	0.311	0.355	0.264	0.297
	N	10287	6328	1100	1970	3070
	Momeduc=col grad	0.228	0.270	0.155	0.114	0.128
N	10287	6328	1100	1970	3070	
Momeduc>col grad	0.155	0.179	0.131	0.069	0.091	
N	10287	6328	1100	1970	3070	
BirthMom	0.945	0.949	0.920	0.958	0.945	
N	10681	6173	959	1888	2847	

	MomSpkEng	0.884	0.990	0.989	0.509	0.681
	N	10287	6328	1100	1970	3070
	MomWorkYr	0.797	0.813	0.841	0.724	0.766
	N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189
	MomUSborn	0.813	0.956	0.880	0.411	0.579
	N	10287	6328	1100	1970	3070
	LowIncome	0.161	0.083	0.297	0.338	0.323
	N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189
<i>School Controls</i>	SmSch	0.450	0.479	0.442	0.376	0.400
	N	10301	6301	1131	1980	3111
	MSch	0.240	0.233	0.288	0.242	0.259
	N	9504	5823	1063	1792	2855
	Lrgsch	0.283	0.264	0.286	0.329	0.314
	N	10301	6301	1131	1980	3111
	Poverty	0.541	0.442	0.759	0.739	0.746
	N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189
	HighMinPop	0.714	0.597	0.969	0.926	0.941
	N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189
	City	0.316	0.233	0.493	0.464	0.474
	N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189
	Suburb	0.508	0.539	0.392	0.471	0.442
	N	10681	6563	1155	2034	3189
	Rural	0.176	0.228	0.115	0.066	0.084
	N	10681	6563	1155	2034	2034

Notes: Table shows means of variables and sample size by race and ethnicity for the National Household Education Survey data .

**Table 2: Effects of Being Minority on Placement in Special Education**

*Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey*

	Variable	(1)	(2)	
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	BlackHisp	0.029 [ 0.026]		
	Black		0.048 [0.0366]	
	Hispanic		0.014 [0.0318]	
	Other	0.020 [0.0341]	0.020 [0.0341]	
<i>Child Controls</i>	Male	0.047 [0.0186]**	0.047 [0.0187]**	
	Age	-0.005 [0.003]*	-0.005 [0.0028]*	
	EngChldHome	-0.235 [0.0739]**	-0.237 [0.0739]**	
	BehavProbs	0.090 [0.0372]**	-0.2371 [0.0372]**	
	ShlWrkProbs	0.145 [0.0326]**	0.146 [0.0326]**	
	ChldReptGrd	0.222 [0.0287]**	0.221 [ 0.0288]**	
	ChldUSborn	0.047 [0.0533]	0.046 [0.0533]	
	<i>Family Controls</i>	Momeduc< high sch	0.004 [0.0516]	0.005 [0.0516]
		Momeduc=high sch	0.027 [0.0316]	0.029 [0.0316]*
Momeduc some col		-0.016 [0.0272]	-0.015 [0.0272]	
Momeduc=col grad		-0.012 [0.0286]	-0.0117 [0.0286]	
BirthMom		-0.091	-0.090	



		[0.0356]	[0.0358]**
	MomSpkEng	0.096 [0.0657]	0.086 [0.0666]
	MomWorkYr	-0.041 [0.0243]*	-0.042 [0.0243]*
	MomUSborn	-0.004 [0.0405]	-0.007 [0.0407]
	LowIncome	0.014 [0.0288]	0.012 [0.0290]
<i>School Controls</i>	MSch	-0.038 [0.0236]	-0.037 [0.0236]
	LrgSch	-0.048 [0.0270]*	-0.048 [0.0270]*
	Poverty	0.004 [0.0207]	0.004 [0.0208]
	HighMinPop	-0.031 [0.0227]	-0.032 [0.0227]
	Suburb	0.015 [0.0219]	0.0145 [0.0219]
	Rural	-0.057 [0.0285]**	-0.058 [0.0285]**
	Public	0.162 [0.0242]**	0.162 [0.0243]**
	N	2211	2211

Notes: Each column corresponds to a separate regression estimate of equation (1) in the text. Column (1) estimates the model for underrepresented minorities (Blacks and Hispanics) and column (2) estimates the model using dummy variables for each racial/ethnic group. A single asterisk denotes significance at the 5% level, and a double asterisk denotes significance at the 1% level. All models were run using heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors.

**Table 3: Effects of Being Minority on Whether Child has Disability**

*Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey*

	Variable	(1)	(2)
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	BlackHisp	-0.035 [0.0117]**	
	Black		-0.078 [0.0148]**
	Hispanic		-0.016 [0.0143]
	Other	0.016 [0.0162]	0.022 [0.0162]
<i>Child Controls</i>	Male	0.061 [0.0083]**	0.061 [0.0083]**
	Age	0.004 [0.0013]**	0.004 [0.0013]**
	EngChldHome	-0.021 [0.0192]	-0.017 [0.0192]
	BehavProbs	0.193 [0.0264]**	0.1943 [0.0264]**
	ShlWrkProbs	0.179 [0.0238]**	0.179 [0.0238]**
	ChldReptGrd	0.212 [0.0185]**	0.215 [0.0185]**
	ChldUSborn	0.035 [0.0175]*	0.034 [0.0175]**
	<i>Family Controls</i>	Momeduc < high sch	-0.034 [0.0209]*
Momeduc =high sch		-0.041 [0.0145]**	-0.044 [0.0145]**
Momeduc some col		-0.022 [0.0134]	-0.023 [0.0134]*
Momeduc=col grad		-0.050 [0.0135]**	-0.051 [0.0135]**
BirthMom		-0.071	-0.071

		[0.0208]**	[0.0208]**
	MomSpkEng	0.043 [0.0198]**	0.065 [0.0203]**
	MomWorkYr	-0.044 [0.0111]**	-0.043 [0.0110]**
	MomUSborn	0.067 [0.0154]**	0.073 [0.0154]**
	LowIncome	0.050 [0.0136]**	0.053 [0.0136]**
<i>School Controls</i>	MSch	-0.009 [0.0104]	-0.009 [0.0103]
	LrgSch	-0.018 [0.0122]	-0.020 [0.0122]
	Poverty	0.000 [0.0093]	0.000 [0.0093]
	HighMinPop	0.005 [0.0107]	0.000 [0.0107]
	Suburb	-0.012 [0.0099]	-0.014 [0.0099]
	Rural	-0.006 [0.0142]	-0.006 [0.0142]
	Public	0.004 [0.0126]	0.005 [0.0126]
	N	2211	2211

Notes: Each column corresponds to a separate regression estimate of equation (1) in the text. Column (1) estimates the model for underrepresented minorities (Blacks and Hispanics) and column (2) estimates the model using dummy variables for each racial/ethnic group. A single asterisk denotes significance at the 5% level, and a double asterisk denotes significance at the 1% level. All models were run using heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors.

**Table 4: Effects of Being Minority on Placement in Special Education**  
(limited to population having disability)

*Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey*

	Variable	(1)	(2)	
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	BlackHisp	0.021 [ 0.0285]		
	Black		0.042 [0.0398]	
	Hispanic		0.042 [0.0348]	
	Other	-0.003 [0.0367]	-0.003 [0.0368]	
<i>Child Controls</i>	Male	0.048 [0.0206]**	0.048 [0.0206]	
	Age	-0.005 [0.0029]**	-0.005 [0.0029]*	
	EngChldHome	-0.246 [0.0772]	-0.248 [0.0773]**	
	BehavProbs	0.106 [0.0411]**	0.106 [0.0411]**	
	ShlWrkProbs	0.159 [0.0355]**	0.160 [0.0356]**	
	ChldReptGrd	0.230 [0.0306]**	0.229 [0.0307]**	
	ChldUSborn	0.056 [0.0567]	0.055 [0.0567]	
	<i>Family Controls</i>	Momeduc < high sch	0.009 [0.0555]	0.011 [0.0556]
		Momeduc =high sch	0.038 [0.0342]	0.040 [0.0343]
Momeduc some col		-0.001 [0.0299]	0.001 [0.0299]	
Momeduc=col grad		-0.009 [0.0315]	-0.008 [0.0315]	
BirthMom		-0.091	-0.090	

		[0.0392]**	[0.0394]**
	MomSpkEng	0.114 [0.0694]*	0.102 [0.0706]
	MomWorkYr	-0.023 [0.0261]	-0.024 [0.0262]
	MomUSborn	-0.007 [0.0442]	-0.010 [0.0444]
	LowIncome	0.018 [0.0314]	0.016 [0.0316]
<i>School Controls</i>	MSch	-0.029 [0.0259]	-0.028 [0.0259]
	LrgSch	-0.041 [0.0295]	-0.041 [0.0295]
	Poverty	-0.004 [0.0227]	-0.004 [0.0227]
	HighMinPop	-0.038 [0.0251]	-0.039 [0.0251]
	Suburb	0.016 [0.0241]	0.017 [0.0242]
	Rural	-0.085 [0.0312]**	-0.085 [0.0313]**
	Public	0.174 [0.0271]**	0.174 [0.0272]**
	N	1920	1920

Notes: Each column corresponds to a separate regression estimate of equation (1) in the text limited to the sample where Disability=1. Column (1) estimates the model for underrepresented minorities (Blacks and Hispanics) and column (2) estimates the model using dummy variables for each racial/ethnic group. A single asterisk denotes significance at the 5% level, and a double asterisk denotes significance at the 1% level. All models were run using heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors.

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