

From: Johnston, Russell (DESE) [<mailto:Russell.Johnston@mass.gov>]

Sent: Monday, November 23, 2020 11:14 AM

Subject: Significant Disproportionality in Special Education

Dear Superintendents, Special Education Directors, Curriculum Directors, and District Business Leaders,

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“the Department”) and local educational agencies (LEAs) across the Commonwealth have made it their priority to increase educational access and equity for our most marginalized students, especially students with disabilities. This priority necessitates that we identify significant disproportionality in special education and respond to it. In alignment with this work, annually, the Department is required to analyze data from LEAs to identify and report to the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) significant disproportionality in special education of racial and ethnic groups. This analysis is conducted pursuant to requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), [34 CFR §§ 300.646-300.647](#).

The Department has reviewed your LEA’s Student Information Management System (SIMS) and Student Safety and Discipline Report (SSDR) data from three prior school years, and **has not identified significant disproportionality** by race or ethnicity in special education identification, placement or discipline in your LEA.

Please be aware that the data used for this year’s significant disproportionality in special education calculations was not impacted by the pandemic, because the most recent data used for any calculations is from the October 2019 Student Information Management System (SIMS) enrollment count.

The Department recognizes that there are often unique circumstances that contribute to significant disproportionality in special education in an LEA’s data. For example, in some cases the identified LEA may not be the school system that conducted the eligibility determinations of the students who contributed to the finding of significant disproportionality for the LEA. If this is the case for your LEA, the Department will work to support your LEA in its unique circumstance.

A more detailed letter describing this determination and a data snapshot showing your district’s data is available in your district’s Special Education State Performance Plan DropBox in the Department’s [Security Portal](#). If you do not have access or need extra assistance finding this DropBox, please be in contact with your [district’s directory administrator](#).

The Department also has put together [two quick reference guides \(QRGs\)](#) about IDEA’s significant disproportionality requirements that provide additional context for the regulatory requirements, methodology for identification, and fiscal impacts of the identification of significant disproportionality. Both of these QRGs are available here: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/idea2004/sig-dispro/resources.html>. Please also visit our significant disproportionality website for more information on this initiative: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/idea2004/sig-dispro/>.

I encourage you to review this information, as well as additional resources specified in the memorandum and available on the website. Please contact Brian Coonley of the Department’s Special Education Planning & Policy Office at 781-338-3374 or brian.coonley@mass.gov with questions. He will be your primary point of contact on this matter.

During this COVID-19 emergency, we thank you for your extraordinary efforts to meet the needs of students and families. The Department recognizes the challenges that LEAs, students and families are experiencing with regard to the ongoing pandemic and we will be mindful of these challenges as we work with you this year.

Thank you for your shared attention to this important work.

Sincerely,



Russell D. Johnston, PhD

Senior Associate Commissioner

cc: Brian Coonley, Equity and Inclusion Specialist