American Educational Research Journal
April 2023, Vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 367–404
DOI: 10.3102/00028312221147007
Article reuse guidelines: sagepub.com/journals-permissions

The Aftermath of Disproportionality Citations: Situating Disability-Race Intersections in Historical, Spatial, and Sociocultural Contexts

Adai A. Tefera
University of Arizona
Alfredo J. Artiles
Stanford University
Catherine Kramarczuk Voulgarides
City University of New York–Hunter College
Alexandra Aylward
University of Texas at Austin
Sarah Alvarado
Independent Scholar

We used a situated approach to examine the aftermath of citations for racial disparities in special education and discipline. The study was conducted in one suburban school district and examined staff's interpretations and responses to multiple disproportionality citations. We found that historical, spatial, and sociocultural contexts mediated stakeholders' interpretations and reactions to citations and the consequences of their responses. Our findings demonstrate how a history of race relations in the district and the community as well as spatial opportunity structures shaped disability and discipline racial disparities; the consequences of a damaged imagery for multiply marginalized youth and their families in explanations of disproportionality citations; and the shortcomings of the district's symbolic and predominately color-evasive responses as a consequence of ambiguous federal and state policy mandates.

Keywords: Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), racial disproportionality, special education, qualitative, suburban

Racial disparities in special education constitute a persistent civil rights challenge in the United States. Over five decades of scholarly scrutiny shows that the intent of special education policy—to expand civil rights to

---

Correction (March 2023): Article updated to include a missing funding note in the Notes section.

students with disabilities—is a promise yet to be fulfilled. Two National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine reports and ongoing scholarship have established the persistence of racial disparities in disability identification and discipline outcomes (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Skiba et al., 2014). Research demonstrates that the contours and direction of the problem and the affected groups shift as the data are examined across different scales (nation, state, city, district), groups (disability category, race, language, gender), and geographic locations (urban, suburban, rural) (Skiba et al., 2008), with

---

Adai A. Tefera (she/her) is an assistant professor of special education at the University of Arizona, The Education Building, 1430 E. 2nd Street Tucson, AZ; e-mail: *adaitefera @arizona.edu*. Her scholarship examines how federal and state educational policies aimed at improving equity among multiply marginalized students with disabilities and their families are enacted, interrupted, and resisted by students, families, educators, and leaders. Dr. Tefera aims to engage in research-practice-policy partnerships as a tool for justice in education.

Alfredo J. Artiles' interdisciplinary scholarship examines the dual nature of disability as an object of protection and a tool of stratification. He studies how responses to disability intersections with race, language, gender, and social class can unwittingly stratify educational opportunities and is advancing responses to these inequities

Catherine Kramarczuk Voulgarides is an assistant professor in the Department of Special Education at the City University of New York (CUNY), Hunter College, and is a faculty associate at Hunter College's Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute. She is a sociologist of education with expertise in critical sociological theory, policy studies, education policy, and law; and in the practice and methodologies of special education. She is a qualitative and mixed methods researcher, and her publications, research, and practice-based work have focused on understanding the relationship between IDEA compliance and racial inequity in special education outcomes across varied contexts, particularly in urban and suburban locales.

Alexandra Aylward is a research fellow in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Texas at Austin. With her degree in sociology of education, Dr. Aylward's research relies on quantitative and mixed-methods approaches to investigate the relationship between social contextual factors and racial/ethnic inequality in educational opportunity, specifically as it concerns special education and exclusionary discipline. Currently, Dr. Aylward is leading the quantitative analyses researching diversity and turnover within Texas schools and how this relates to gaps in educational opportunity.

Sarah Alvarado is an independent scholar, a graduate of Arizona State University's Literacies and Technologies PhD program in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers' College. As a doctoral student, Sarah was awarded a fellowship from the United States Office of Special Education Programs titled "Evidence-Based interventions in High-Need Schools: An Interdisciplinary Program to Prepare Special Education Faculty." Leveraging her professional experience as a classroom teacher for 16 years, her research examines special education identification processes and practices for culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Dr. Alvarado's work is grounded in sociocultural theory of human learning and development to account for the multiple factors that mediate culturally and linguistically diverse learners' special education identification and classification decisions, and how practitioners address students' multiple needs within inclusive settings.

Black and Indigenous students most affected. Notably, much of the research focuses on predictors of disproportionality, utilizing large secondary datasets and quantitative methodologies (Cruz & Rodl, 2018). Most studies examine the role of sociodemographic factors and, to a lesser extent, professional practices (Waitoller et al., 2010). Research also points to alarming trends in punitive disciplinary practices of learners with disabilities, particularly students from racialized backgrounds (Losen & Martinez, 2021). Despite the longevity of research on disproportionality, in recent years, several studies challenged decades of research, reporting that students of color are *under*represented in special education (e.g., Morgan et al., 2015). Notably, this work has been criticized on theoretical and methodological grounds (Collins et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2016).

A consistent criticism of scholarship on disproportionality research is the oversimplification of the problem, particularly given some recent framing focused on binary questions—for example, Is there overrepresentation? Is special education racist? Less is known, however, about this problem from a situated perspective–that is, considering how local contexts, including sociocultural and historical factors, shape disproportionality outcomes. Few studies, for instance, examine the role of professionals' beliefs and perceptions of students of color in disproportionality (Cruz et al., 2021). Even fewer studies have targeted the perspectives of stakeholders in schools at distinctive locations such as suburban settings (see Ahram et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2006; Tefera et al., 2022). Skiba et al. (2006) documented how teachers explained the causes of disproportionality and found that "cultural gaps and misunderstandings [between teachers and students of color] may intensify behavioral challenges" [which was a significant issue for teachers] (p. 1424) (see also Ahram et al., 2011). Teachers in this study also regarded special education as the only resource to support struggling learners and were reluctant to discuss the role of race in disproportionality. With few exceptions (e.g., Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2021), the research on the local perspectives of professionals *after* disproportionality is documented is virtually nil. There is even a greater knowledge gap about such perspectives in school districts with recurring patterns of disproportionality.

Other neglected aspects of a situated perspective in the study of disproportionality are equally significant. For example, a historical perspective can shed new light on changes in policies and practices over time regarding education equity for multiply marginalized students with disabilities (Eitle, 2002). Similarly, attention to spatial factors within a community (e.g., racial and economic segregation of schools) opens up opportunities to understand how marginalized students with disabilities may be positioned differently based on their physical and social location within a school or community. Additionally, while research is bringing new light to how educators attempt to comply with education policies related to disproportionality (e.g., Ahram et al., 2011; Albrecht et al., 2012), more scholarship is needed to understand

the relationship between school personnel's explanations and responses to the problem and their ongoing efforts to comply with policy mandates, especially in districts faced with enduring disproportionality. Finally, although disproportionality is documented in urban contexts (e.g., Sullivan et al., 2014), less is known about how and why these disparities emerge in suburban communities (Ahram et al., 2011). Indeed, the changing nature of suburban schools with their increasing diversity make them beneficial locations to expand understandings about race, place, and inequities in education (Diamond et al., 2021).

In this study, we aimed to address these research limitations and contribute to the next generation of disproportionality research in three distinctive ways. First, we emphasize a situated perspective using qualitative methods to study the aftermath of disproportionality, an aspect rarely addressed in the literature. Specifically, we examine how district and school staff working in a district with recuring citations interpreted and responded to disproportionality monitoring requirements. Second, we focused on contextual influences—another key research gap—by examining how interpretations and responses to multiple disproportionality citations within a school district were shaped by historical, spatial, and sociocultural considerations. Third, we studied a suburban school district with increasing racial, linguistic, and economic diversity given evidence that rates of disproportionality are increasing in suburban communities (Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2014). To address these aims, we asked the following research questions: *How do spatial and sociocultural contextual influences mediate the historical production of racial disparities in a suburban school district? How do suburban school district educators explain multiple citations for racial disproportionality in special education?* And, *How do suburban school district educators respond to these citations?*

Next, we set the context for the study with an overview of special education policy and outline the project's conceptual framework. We then describe the study methods, followed by the research findings. We end with a discussion about what can be learned from school districts struggling with disproportionality.

Racial Disproportionality in Special Education and Policy Responses: A Primer

According to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), each state determines a numerical threshold for disproportionality based on school districts that identify, place outside the general education classroom, or discipline children from any racial or ethnic subgroup at markedly higher rates than their peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).[1] IDEA was reauthorized three times—in 1990, 1997, and 2004. The 1997 reauthorization included formal recognition of disproportionality and provided guidance for local education agencies (LEAs) and state education agencies (SEAs) on how to identify the problem. However, questions regarding the effectiveness of initial

regulations to abate racial inequities in special education have been raised (Albrecht et al., 2012). The 2004 policy clarified how disproportionality is measured and resulted in states adopting 20 State Performance Plan (SPP) indicators to monitor special education outcomes within school districts (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)). Three SPP indicators focus on disproportionality. Indicator 4 has two components: 4A refers to significant discrepancies in the rates of long-term suspensions of students with disabilities compared to districts in a state; and 4B refers to significant discrepancies in the rates of long-term suspensions of students with disabilities, based on race and ethnicity, compared to districts in a state *due to inappropriate policies, procedures, or practices*. Indicator 9 refers to the disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in *special education and related services* that is the result of *inappropriate identification*. Indicator 10 is the disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in *specific disability categories* as a result of *inappropriate identification*.

An LEA is required to reserve 15% of their total special education funds on coordinated early intervening services (CEIS) if there is *significant disproportionality* based on race or ethnicity with regard to identification, placement in restrictive educational settings, or discipline (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). It is important to note that IDEA does not define *significant disproportionality*. Instead, the law requires "states to use a standard methodology for analysis of disproportionality, which includes a threshold above which disproportionality in the identification, placement, or discipline of children with disabilities within an LEA is significant" (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, p. 1). Scholars have pointed to challenges related to the ambiguities in this definition leading to differences among states in their thresholds (Cavendish et al., 2014). The latitude afforded to states in defining, monitoring, and addressing disproportionality results in significant variance in terms of what counts as disproportionality and whether it is sufficiently addressed through IDEA (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2013).

Equity concerns underlying disproportionality include the specter of misidentification or whether disproportionate patterns reflect (individual or institutional) racial bias. At the heart of these concerns is whether disability identification will compound the stigma (and its consequences) that racialized groups already experience by virtue of their marginalized status. Moreover, questions about disparities in accessing special education resources *after* identification have been raised (Artiles, 2019)—for example, Are racialized groups placed in more segregated settings, or do they receive fewer related services than their White counterparts *with the same disability diagnosis*? Disproportionality, therefore, produces an equity paradox in which an equity remedy for one group (special education students)—might unwittingly be creating other inequities—further marginalization of racialized learners (Artiles, 2011). It is possible this paradox is shaped by, in part, the policy's ambiguous and primarily technical framing, focused on monitoring and

compliance (Kramarczuk Voulgarides, 2018), and a disregard for how different contextual influences mediate racial disparities (Harry & Klinger, 2014). Of significance, there is an absence in this literature of the complex sociohistorical and cultural nature of schools, which can create and perpetuate inequities (Welner, 2001). Thus, there is an urgent need to understand neglected critical dimensions of this problem, particularly the aftermath of disproportionality citations.

A Critical Cultural-Historical View of Racial Disparities

Our research on racial disparities in subjective disabilities[2] is informed by the foundational theoretical premise that disability has a dual nature, as an object of protection and a tool of stratification (Artiles et al., 2016).[3] A disability diagnosis can cast a stigma, but it also affords entitlements and access to services, thus protecting the educational rights of individuals. Nevertheless, there are sociocultural processes, practices, and structural dynamics that make disability a means of marginalization that we describe as *DefectCraft*, a notion previously conceptualized by the second author that leverages the theoretical and empirical literature on racial disparities, interdisciplinary scholarship on race and inequality, and a critical sociocultural perspective (Artiles, 2003, 2011, 2019a; Bal et al., 2018; Benjamin, 2014, 2017; Fields & Fields, 2012; Harris, 2001; Lamont & Pierson, 2019; Omi & Winant, 2014; powel & Menendian, 2016).[4] Our previous work documented that DefectCraft is constituted by othering processes and practices that peg deficits and deficiencies to already stigmatized individuals and groups (Artiles, 2011). Moreover, DefectCraft makes the newly attached deficits distinctively inherent traits of these groups. From a DefectCraft perspective, it is reasoned that racial disparities in subjective disabilities are defensible due to the disproportionate poverty rate among students of color. In this way, DefectCraft biologizes race and sanctions a deficit mindset about racialized bodies. In other words, racial disparities are justified because racialized learners have deficits that require fixing (Harris, 2011). DefectCraft uses the ideology of colorblindness[5] to obfuscate the structural weight of race and the cultural-historical conditions that racialized groups experience, while scapegoating the cultures of racialized groups (e.g., bad parenting, inadequate linguistic practices). However, Benjamin (2017) reminds us that "cultural explanations for disparate outcomes is an ever-ready lexicon with deeply racist roots" (p. 228). Stated differently, DefectCraft construes racial disparities in disability rates as detached from considerations regarding unjust access to opportunities, discriminatory infrastructures, historical wealth disparities, racial segregation, and stratified access to health care and food delivery systems (Darity, 2011). A perverse consequence of DefectCraft is that it naturalizes disproportionality in subjective disability rates—for example, high poverty rates and inadequate home cultures in communities of color explain racial disparities in disability rates.

Understanding the mechanisms of DefectCraft makes visible how racial disparities are structurally constituted. DefectCraft flattens people's intersectional identities (e.g., disability-race) giving primacy to single identity markers—for example, is race or poverty the cause of disability identification? In addition, DefectCraft elides the influence of cultural-historical contexts and spatial factors by using aggregate evidence at broader scales. Finally, social mechanisms perpetuate the inequalities of racial disparities, which are particularly visible in school responses to remedy policy mandates. Grounded in the multifaceted notion of DefectCraft, we attend to five aspects in our analysis of racial disparities to garner a situated and nuanced understanding of this problem.

1. Formation of disability and racial identities and their attendant consequences. It is necessary to document if identities are constructed using a binary logic (normal/abnormal; White/non-White) and as biologically rooted (Shifrer & Frederick, 2019), or as social constructions in which sociocultural, historical, political, and economic forces shape their formations and their attendant hierarchies (Artiles, 2011; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Omi & Winant, 2014). Bestowing identities begets *recognition* (e.g., adscription of membership in racial or disabled groups) and affords *access* to resources based on identities (e.g., specialized services, special benefits). Inquire how local actors conceptualize disability—for example, is it *pathologized* when applied to racialized students and *medicalized* when assigned to white learners? How are the connections between recognition, distribution of resources and the (re)production of inequality formulated? For example, is access to resources differentially distributed across groups?

2. Roles of ideologies in the construction of identities. Disability and racial identities are constructions of human difference. Examine whether *othering* processes or structures use disability (or race) to beget marginalization and inequality among groups (Lamont & Pierson, 2019; powel & Menendian, 2016). It is important to document the role of deficit thinking (e.g., is there an emphasis on attributing deficiencies to build hierarchies?) and color-evasive ideologies (e.g., is the role of race ignored or erased?) in explanations of racial disparities. Beliefs, values, tools, and routine practices often encode deficit constructions and color-evasive ideologies (Annamma & Jackson, 2017; Bonilla Silva, 2006; Erevelles & Minear, 2010). Further, it is necessary to examine if deficit views of racial disparities are used to construct students of color as *innately* defective or incompetent, thus generating ideology-ontology circuits (Artiles, 2022).

3. Identity intersections and cultural-historical influences. Although disproportionality entails at least two identities—race and disability—it is important to trace whether a unitary approach is used where one identity is assumed

to be more stable and significant than others (Hancock, 2007)—for example, is race or social class assumed to predict a disability diagnosis (Artiles, 2013)? Stated differently, the conventional practice of "controlling for race" in statistical analyses presumes race is an independent variable that produces outcomes, instead of being the result of social processes (Benjamin, 2014). Moreover, the analysis of cultural-historical influences requires attention to whether the historical entanglements of race and disability are accounted for (Baynton, 2005): What is the history of disability-race intersections in these school contexts? What is the history of race relations in the surrounding communities? How is the confluence of various forms of oppression (race, disability) played out in people's everyday experiences? For instance, are abstractions of racialized bodies used to naturalize racial disparities (Ross, 1990)? These abstractions are produced with technical tools or measures (e.g., intelligence, language competence, poverty) that erase the cultural historical contexts in which such disparities are produced (e.g., segregation, stigma and lower status, racialized access to resources) (Artiles, 2011, 2019a; Fields & Fields, 2012), thus "*failing* to produce adequate representations of how and why disparities persist" (Benjamin, 2017, p. 228, emphasis in original).

4. Role of space in the production of racial disparities. Educational inequity "is in part . . . a manifestation of inequality occurring at the level of individuals, families, and groups that is mapped on to spaces. However, spatial opportunity structures and inequalities are due to the intentional efforts to organize physical spaces in ways that maintain or reinforce inequality" (Galster & Sharkey, 2017, p. 2). This is a crucial assumption given the deepening of societal inequities and sociodemographic shifts in urban and suburban communities (Tate, 2008). For instance, research suggests that the configuration and magnitude of racial disparities vary depending on the demographics, historical moment, and locations of school districts (Oswald et al., 2002; Shifrer & Fish, 2020). It is critical to analyze the role of space in the formation and reproduction of racial disparities: How does the organization of space contribute to these disparities? Are identities of groups linked to spatial considerations? Are there relations or practices in certain spaces contributing forces in shaping such disparities?

5. Social mechanisms mediating school and district responses to remedy mandates. This entails the examination of routine practices and organizational spaces in which school staff grapple with equity policies to address racial disparities in subjective disabilities. Social mechanisms produce and maintain inequalities in institutions. Multiple such mechanisms have been identified and are used in this analysis. For instance, *legitimization* refers to "a bias to accept the perceived status quo as appropriate" (Lamont & Pierson, 2019, p. 8). This mechanism justifies meritocratic ideas and prejudices toward marginalized groups. *Evaluation* is a mechanism used to create

categories of students sorted in hierarchies that reinforce inequality though meritocratic criteria used to distribute resources and recognize status (Lamont & Pierce, 2019). *Quantification* is a mechanism that rests on metrics that can buttress inequalities.

Methods

This study was part of a larger mixed methods project that aimed to understand the contextual factors that contribute to racial disproportionality in identification and discipline in suburban school districts. In this article, we report on one case study[6] conducted in the state over an 18-month period between 2014 and 2016. To select the school district, we first conducted descriptive analyses of school district citations in a northeastern state from the 2004–2005 school year—following the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA—to the 2011–2012 school year. We focused on these dates to account for the stricter disproportionality regulations included in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. The descriptive analysis examined all citations in the state during this period across Indicators 4, 9, and 10. The analysis revealed that suburban districts received the most citations compared to urban and rural districts in the state. The analysis also revealed that of the over 200 suburban districts in the state, 43% were cited at least once in the period under review. Therefore, we chose to focus on suburban school districts because they had the highest rate of citations in the state and given the scarcity of disproportionality research in suburban areas.

Descriptive analyses also revealed that cited suburban districts were more racially and linguistically diverse, had higher poverty rates, and lower levels of achievement compared to suburban districts that were never cited (see Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2021). In addition, suburban districts with three or more citations enrolled the highest number of students of color and suspension rates in these districts were more than three times greater than districts that were never cited. In short, we concluded cited suburban school districts were potentially rich contexts to examine how school staff understood and responded to disproportionality.

School District Selection

Results from the descriptive analyses were used to identify suburban school districts that had fluctuating citation patterns under disproportionality Indicators 4, 9, or 10. We targeted suburban districts that received at least three citations from 2004 to 2011 for disproportionality because of the 3-year timeline prescribed by the state department of education for addressing disproportionality if cited under Indicators 4, 9, or 10. According to state guidelines, after receiving an initial citation for disproportionality, school districts were required to undergo a self-directed IDEA compliance review of their policies, practices, and procedures as they relate to the nature of the citation. If a district remained above the state's determined numerical threshold

for racial disparities for more than 3 years, or if they were noncompliant with IDEA mandates, the state would intervene and actively monitor district actions and responses. If a district was cited and then recited within a short period, the state offered supplementary professional development and technical assistance services to the LEAs and continued to monitor compliance with IDEA mandates regarding significant disproportionality. Therefore, we posited educators working in districts with fluctuating histories of at least three citations had complex experiences taking actions and responding to citations and could share their local practices to address the citations over multiple years.

The state determined significant disproportionality by using a risk index and relative risk ratio (see Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2021). The state could cite a school district through either measurement. All school districts were subject to the same threshold for disproportionality. The evidence showed that 31 districts in the state had at least three citations during the study period. Of the 31 districts, two suburban school districts from this pool agreed to participate in the qualitative portion of our project. We report the findings from one of the LEAs—Lakeview School District.[7]

The Context of Lakeview School District

Located in a middle-income community in a northeastern U.S. state, Lakeview School District is one of 90 + LEAs in the region, of which Lakeview ranked in the top 10 on academic outcomes. The high achievement of the district contributed to academic accolades such as its schools being awarded with blue ribbons of academic distinction. The district served about 3,000 students in its four schools, including two elementary schools—Morningstar and Holbrook; one middle school—Lakeview Middle School; and one high school—Lakeview High School.

Morningstar and Holbrook were located in opposite ends of the district. While Morningstar had the most sociodemographic diversity in the district and bordered the lowest-ranked urban school district in the region—Center City—Holbrook included mostly White students and was adjacent to the top-ranked school district in the region. Lakeview Middle and High School were located near one another in the center of the district. Substantial demographic shifts occurred in Lakeview during our study period from 2004 to 2011. Table 1 shows that while the number of students of color, students on free/reduced-priced lunch, and the number of emergent bilingual learners increased, the number of White students and the overall number of students decreased in the district. At the same time, the suspension rate nearly quadrupled during our study period.

Although racially, linguistically, and religiously diverse, the state under investigation had among the most racially segregated schools in the country. Given growing evidence of segregation in school districts and its implication for educational opportunity (Clotfelter et al., 2018), we examined segregation within Lakeview by calculating the dissimilarity index. This index measures

Table 1
Lakeview School District Sociodemographics and Suspension Rates, 2004–2011

Year	Total Students in District	Students of Color (%)	White Students (%)	Free/Reduced-Priced Lunch (%)	Special Education Population (%)	Emergent Bilingual Population (%)	Suspension (%)
2004	3,084	20.5	79.5	13.1	n.a.	0.8	1.2
2011	2,889	25.1	74.9	20.0	10.7	2.1	4.0

Note. n.a. = data not available.

Table 2
Index of Dissimilarity, 2004–2011

Year	Black-White	Latinx-White	Citation
2004	.28	.18	✔
2005	.23	.16	
2006	.24	.30	
2007	.19	.21	
2008	.20	.21	✔
2009	.20	.24	
2010	.21	.24	✔
2011	.20	.19	
Mean	.22	.21	

the degree to which students of any two racial/ethnic groups are distributed evenly across the schools within a school district. For instance, if every school in Lakeview had the same proportion of students between two racial groups, the index would be 0. In contrast, if all schools were completely segregated, the index would be 1.0. Typically, an index $\geq .6$ demonstrates high segregation between schools within a district (Massey & Denton, 1993). Table 2 shows the Black-White and Latinx-White dissimilarity scores in Lakeview from 2004 to 2011, as well as the year they received a citation for disproportionality. The Black-White dissimilarity index in the district ranged from .19 to .28, and the Latinx-White index ranged from .16 to .24, but the latter showed more fluctuation.

Lakeview also struggled with racial disproportionality in *both* identifying Black students with disabilities and disciplining Black students (both with and without disabilities). While White students comprised approximately 75% of the student population in Lakeview, they made up slightly less than 60% of students that received in-school and out-of-school suspensions (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In comparison, Black students comprised approximately 15% of students in the district yet made up just above 40% of students that received in- and out-of-school suspension. Similar discipline disparities existed for students with disabilities.

Neighboring the Lakeview school district was the urban school district of Center City, making Lakeview an inner-ring suburb of Center City. Center City faced many of the challenges densely populated urban communities around the country face. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), approximately 60% of residents in Center City were people of color. The median income in the city was nearly $35,000 per year, and over 30% of residents lived in poverty. Lakeview, on the other hand, included about 20% residents of color, with a median income of about $75,000, and approximately 10% of residents living in poverty (U.S. Census, 2018).

In 2004 and 2008, Lakeview was cited under Indicator 10 (racial disproportionality in identifying students with disabilities in certain disability categories). In 2010, the district was cited under Indicator 4B (racial disproportionality in discipline for students with disabilities). Lakeview received additional citations in 2012 and 2015 under Indicators 4A and 4B for disproportionately suspending Black students and Black students with disabilities. Although the last two citations (2012, 2015) occurred outside our study period, repeated citations demonstrate the district's ongoing struggle with racial disparities in special education.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data collection and analysis took place over a period of 18 months. Data were drawn primarily from individual interviews, but also included school district documents, participant observations, a focus group with students, and follow-up in-person and phone interviews. Interviews allowed participants to share their views and discuss their reactions or ambivalences regarding policies and practices related to disproportionality and Lakeview's context.

A total of 30 in-person individual semistructured interviews with educators, including district and building leaders (n = 11), teachers (n = 8), staff (n = 5), and high school students (n = 6) were conducted. Representing the racial dynamics of educators in the district, the majority of leaders, teachers, and staff interviewed were White (n = 23), with far less people of color (n = 1). We also conducted one in-person focus group with four high school students with disabilities. Students interviewed included six students of color and four White students with disabilities. The lead author conducted all interviews, which lasted 45 to 60 minutes, were audio-recorded, and were transcribed verbatim.

Interviews focused on understanding the context of Lakeview and how educators explained and responded to the history of their citations in 2004, 2008, and 2011. We modeled interview protocols based on previous studies on racial (in)equities in special education (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Kramarczuk Voulgarides, 2018). Specifically, the leadership interview protocol was designed for district and school leaders who were directly involved in the citation process. We aimed to understand how the context of Lakeview—for example, historical and sociocultural factors—mediated

educators' explanations of disproportionality, responses to the citation, how administrators were notified of their citation, what reactions ensued, and what steps were taken to address the citation. Consistent with a situated analysis approach, we examined how Lakeview staff explained and responded to the citations to understand how context shaped understandings of policy compliance (Edelman & Talesh, 2011).

The interviews with district and school staff, including teachers, counselors, and social workers explored how staff members understood their professional roles within the context of a district-level citation for disproportionality. During interviews, we also sought to understand individuals' perspectives on the role of local context on district practices, how policies operated in the district, and what it meant to address disproportionality in practice. Interviews with students focused on impressions of community, students, teachers, leaders, and staff, as well as schoolwide policies and practices to understand school climate.

We also collected school district documents, including citation documents, referral procedures, compliance assessments, staff handbooks, the district professional development calendar, school websites, and online media sources. The lead author engaged in participant observations for 2 days at each school site and the surrounding communities of Lakeview and Center City. Observations took place in neighborhoods, hallways, classrooms, and district and school open areas. These observations focused on differences and similarities in material resources in and between schools and communities, distribution of resources within Lakeview and between Lakeview and Center City, as well as relationships between students and educators both in and between classes. Field notes were written to document observations.

The first round of interviews took place over a 2-week period. After this initial data collection period, research team members[8] read and reread the interview and field note data, writing memos regarding initial thoughts about the evidence. The team met biweekly to discuss initial reactions, making connections to the literature and conceptual framework. We then began the coding of data using MAXQDA. Interview data coding began with the development of deductive codes using our conceptual framework and existing literature (MacQueen et al., 1998). Specifically, we used key elements of DefectCraft as a guide as we wrote memos about emerging themes and similarities and differences across stakeholder groups. During the first round of coding, broad descriptive codes were developed. Examples of descriptive codes included "racial segregation," "IDEA challenges," "technical shifts to practice," and "citation response". Next, the research team met to define and refine initial codes using a constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). During this process, we paid attention to similarities and differences within stakeholder groups as well as across groups to reveal emerging themes in the data.

Once interview data were coded, the fifth author reviewed document data (e.g., citation and self-review documents and staff handbooks) to understand connections and divergences between themes in interview and

document data. Field notes were also reviewed and revisited throughout the interview analysis process to explore similarities and differences across different forms of data. A comparative matrix was developed to analyze how interview, document, and observation data related to each other. Once document and observational data were analyzed, we scheduled follow-up in-person interviews with participants to clarify remaining questions and gather more details about themes. After follow-up interviews, we requested additional documents related to the district's citation history, self-reviews, and compliance assessments to add details to emerging themes and patterns and answer the research questions. A final round of phone interviews was conducted with some participants to clarify remaining questions.

Trustworthiness was achieved through calibrating the conceptual clarity and robustness of codes through systematic procedures. We began by developing an initial list of codes with a common set of data. Then, the research team participated in regular debriefing sessions to refine codes and address potential disagreements and lack of clarity in the initial codes. After developing the preliminary list of codes, the first and third authors coded a sample of interview data, assessing the agreement level in the codes. When agreement was attained (i.e., both coders identified similar codes), we decided that codes were acceptable and then defined the codes. If coders did not agree (i.e., two coders did not assign the same code), we reexamined and refined the definition of codes. Once agreement was consistently attained with all codes, the first author coded the corpus of data. Additional trustworthiness strategies included triangulation of the data, engagement in the field, memo writing, and presenting preliminary findings to district leaders as a form of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Study Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, we interviewed only individuals that agreed to participate. We also only conducted member checks with district leaders and not all stakeholders. In addition, the study focused on a district that received disproportionality citations for disability identification *and* discipline suspensions. It will be helpful to conduct fine-grained analyses of stakeholders' interpretations and responses in districts cited for one type of disproportionality (i.e., disability identification or discipline) or districts that were not cited more than one time.

Findings

Space and History in the Present: Situating and Contextualizing Disproportionality Citations

From the outside looking in, Lakeview was the type of suburban district that many families seek to send their children to. Indeed, teachers, leaders,

and students discussed how the district was "like a family." When students entered Lakeview schools, one teacher explained, "[It is like] you're walking into our house, you're our family, you're gonna be treated the way we would treat our own kids." Although educators repeatedly expressed the idea of "family," the challenges the district faced were complex, multifaceted, and in many ways suggested the notion of the Lakeview "family" applied to certain groups only—that is, White families and students. DefectCraft ideology was evident in how some staff articulated *who* was included in the district family. When describing "African American transfer students" and their families moving to Lakeview, one staff member hesitatingly described, "I would say [their] family culture and value for education, at times, is different [than ours]." Another staff member shared her concerns about the "othering" of people of color in Lakeview. She was troubled about White teachers' and leaders' lack of understanding of race and culture, and the ways this lack of understanding "sends a big message to students of color. [Students of color might ask,] 'Am I not worthy? Why can't I see myself in the teaching team? Do my teachers really care about me?'"

We found that historical racial tensions within Lakeview mediated educators' understandings of disproportionality citations. First, Lakeview's formation as a district was deeply tied to historic patterns of White flight from Center City. After World War II, Center City experienced an increase in the number of Black residents due to growth of jobs in the region. The result was a growing Black population that was forced to live in segregated neighborhoods while White residents fled to the suburbs, including Lakeview, contributing to hypersegregation in the community. In fact, a 1960s census report showed that on a scale of 0 to 100 where 0 meant *no segregation*, Center City was rated nearly a 90 (anonymized source).[9] Decades later, in 2010, Center City was still one of the nation's most segregated cities for Black residents. Today, Center City remains one of the largest and most racially and economically segregated cities in the country.

These historical, sociodemographic, and spatial transformations contributed to racial and income segregation that produced racialized differences and inequalities for students throughout the district (Galster & Sharkey, 2017). For example, nearly two decades ago, attempts were made by the then superintendent to challenge racial and economic segregation and integrate schools within Lakeview. In line with DefectCraft's processes that obfuscate mechanisms of power that stratify identities, the superintendent was ultimately forced to resign as a result of oblique political backlash from powerful community members. The current superintendent detailed the contentious time:

> The [then] superintendent and some members of the Board of Education tried to create a K-1-2 school and 3-4-5 school [using the Princeton Model]. It became highly controversial . . . but I think in

> the end the superintendent ended up leaving, quite honestly, because the pressures were so intense. People are very territorial. . . . Is it time to look at that again? Perhaps. We've talked about that. Would that help the transition of these kids into middle school and high school and cause for all of our staff to better understand diversity? Absolutely. Is the community ready for it when you ask the community the question? I don't know.

This was an important historical moment for the district, as it demonstrated the political consequences school leaders were reminded of if attempts were made to engage in institutional changes to improve racial and economic equity, including racial disproportionality in special education. Moreover, the superintendent's reflection reminded us of DefectCraft's attention to historical legacies of inequality in the present—"Is the community ready for it when you ask the community the question? I don't know." This historical evolution also reflects the reproduction of a spatial opportunity structure (Galster & Sharkey, 2017), as White families held on to the prevalent spatial arrangements of schooling and their clear understanding of the privileges and opportunities that were aligned within these spaces. The desire to hold on to these spatial privileges were heavily tied to historical practices. This was evidenced in documents that outlined how discriminatory practices, including redlining, reproduced racial inequities (anonymized source). Bordering the majority Black community of Center City, the principal of Morningstar described how perceptions of the school's composition created a dual housing system and education system in the district. "We [Morningstar] are perceived to be not as successful in achieving academic milestones [compared to Holbrook]. . . . We are perceived as . . . being kinda the ugly stepsister in the district." In this sense, "the constitution of [new] spaces [in Lakeview] reproduce[d] racial hierarchies" (Razack, 2002, p. 1).

Spatial opportunity structures were evident at the neighborhood level as reflected in different socioeconomic and racial configurations (Galster & Sharkey, 2017). Neighborhood schools were also impacted. According to a central office leader, the primary rationale for halting integration efforts in the past was to allow students to attend their "neighborhood school" or "community school" so they could continue walking to their elementary school rather than having to drive across the district (approximately 10 minutes). District leaders and White families legitimized (Lamont & Pierson, 2019) racial, economic, and spatial segregation by co-opting an inclusive education discourse—with its emphasis on the right to attend neighborhood schools. Symptomatic of DefectCraft, the byproduct was the perpetuation of racial segregation without exposing the role of privilege. In this vein, the principal of Morningstar described the ways neighborhood schools upheld segregation within Lakeview. "Segregation, economic segregation, which ends up being racial segregation is killing us. . . . This whole thing about neighborhood

schools . . . it's just a way that we keep people more segregated. I think we need to stop [the practice of neighborhood schools]."

DefectCraft's structuring of spatial inequalities at the school and neighborhood levels naturalized racialized differences. The resulting hierarchies from this form of recognition were associated with the distribution of resources; after all, spatial inequalities can result from the organization of physical spaces in ways that reinforce inequalities (Galster & Sharkey, 2017). The housing sector was a piece of this puzzle as it was consistently mentioned as a significant difference between Morningstar and Holbrook elementary schools. Most prominently, two subsidized housing apartments and university housing near Morningstar were discussed as distinctive features of the housing near Morningstar compared to Holbrook, an area described as having "million-dollar" homes. The principal of Morningstar described how housing shaped perceptions of the two elementary schools and the need to constantly combat the perception of her school not being academically strong, explaining, "Realtors would say [to parents], 'Let's go move over to Holbrook. Let's not go to Morningstar.'" Morningstar and Holbrook were often described as a "dichotomy" between the "haves and the have nots." The principal of Holbrook also described the advantages his school benefited from even in the midst of budget cuts.

> With tighter budgets we lost money . . . so our PTA [Parent Teacher Association] has risen to fulfill that need . . . and on an annual basis our PTA makes available to our teachers a total of $8,000 in grant money they can apply for. . . . [T]hat money then is used to either take students on field trips . . . or to purchase materials for the classroom.

The Holbrook principal went on to explain how the PTA provided him with an additional $1,000 per year to support the school however he chose and described a list of PTA sponsored events throughout the year, including a fall festival, a pancake breakfast, and family fun night. Importantly, while per pupil funding was technically equal across Holbrook and Morningstar, the economic and social capital of parents in Holbrook enabled them to ensure key resource advantages for their students in ways parents of Morningstar could not.

The legacy of racial segregation within the district had important implications for the schools in Lakeview, particularly the two elementary schools. Another central office leader described the contrast between the two schools:

> One of our elementary schools [Holbrook] is geographically located in a more affluent area of Lakeview and has historically had deep roots as being historically more affluent. The other elementary school over at Morningstar is embedded where there's significantly more poverty.

Indeed, we found important material differences between Morningstar and Holbrook. Morningstar teachers were more likely to be in their first year

compared to teachers at Holbrook (8% compared to 2% respectively) (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Teachers at Holbrook also received slightly higher salaries with an average of approximately $60,000 a year compared to Morningstar teachers who made an average of $58,000 a year. Although the difference in salary was small, the perception was that there were significant resource advantages to teaching at Holbrook.

We should note that the recognition of identities that shaped spatial inequalities was not limited to race. Lakeview staff also engaged in DefectCraft evaluative practices (Lamont & Pierson, 2019) that placed all emergent bilingual learners and many special education students at Morningstar. The principal of Morningstar noted,

> We're very different from our sister school of Holbrook because of our demographics. Morningstar is very diverse with most English Language Learners coming to our school. They are from all over the world. . . . Holbrook tends to be above income and are mostly White.

This way, the categorization and intersections of race, language, and ability differences sanctioned the creation of hierarchies distributed across schools that, as we explained above, were ultimately associated with resource distribution and educational opportunity—for example, poor/affluent schools; academically strong/weak schools (Lamont & Pierson, 2019). For instance, in 2011, Morningstar had double the number of students of color compared to Holbrook, and all elementary school suspensions in the district occurred in Morningstar compared to none at Holbrook. Notice that while the racial dissimilarity index did not demonstrate high levels of segregation (see Table 2), this evidence shows DefectCraft, or the sorting and stratification practices embedded in the district.

In turn, DefectCraft*'s* color-evasive ideology was deployed to justify the spatial segregation of groups. In this vein, a central office leader explained,

> It makes the most sense . . . to provide support [to emergent bilingual learners] within the classrooms [at Morningstar]. Not specifically because Morningstar has something more to offer than Holbrook. . . . It was [more about not] pulling teachers and having them travel between two buildings and decreasing the amount of time that we could provide direct services to students.

The question, however, is for *whom* does this make "the most sense"? If one were to use the same logic parents employed when resisting integration efforts two decades earlier, forcing emergent bilingual learners and some students with disabilities who lived near Holbrook to travel to Morningstar would disturb the notion of "neighborhood schools." Yet this was never discussed as a potential inconvenience for emergent bilingual learners or students with disabilities and their families who were compelled to attend Morningstar. Instead, these practices were perceived as innocuous despite

the segregation of students into separate schools during the elementary school years.

Educators often used the fact that all students within the district eventually "flowed" into one middle and high school in the district as conciliation for the segregationist practices that created two distinct elementary schools. A district leader explained that when the students came together in middle and high school, "They don't have all the preconceived biases that they've learned from their families." Similarly, one teacher described that going to the same middle and high school "provide opportunities for students to come together." Yet many teachers and leaders also conceded that students grouped themselves based on the elementary school they attended. To this point, one teacher described that "sometimes kids from Holbrook get a negative false impression and sometimes they're [told by their parents] that 'Oh, they're gonna go meet the Morning kids [once in high school].'" As one district leader explained, "I think there's definitely the haves and the have-nots in the community. I'm sure they are happy to exist parallelly."

The reasoning that all students were integrated at the middle and high school levels was not supported in our analysis. We identified practices within the middle and high schools that continued to reproduce a spatial opportunity structure. For instance, while White students comprised approximately 78% of students in the high school, they made up nearly 88% of students who took at least one advanced placement (AP) course (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Comparatively, Black students made up about 16% of enrollment in the high school and only about 2% of students taking at least one AP course. This reflects a form of hidden segregation that is taking place *within* schools, particularly in districts that are becoming more diverse (Clotfelter et al., 2018). Some students described the consequences of these opportunity structures in the focus group. As one Black student explained,

> I'd prefer to be in honors courses [rather than special education] because it's a faster pace and there's more homework. And since my mom was a teacher, she always wants me to push myself and be motivated which I love to do.

This sentiment was echoed by students in the focus group, the majority of whom were students of color with disabilities who described wanting access to more challenging curriculum to gain the respect they perceived was tied to more challenging courses. Again, this demonstrates that the dissimilarity index (Table 2) did not capture alternative forms of *segregation within* schools that can have key consequences. Notably, the students' value for education departed significantly from the deficit orientations of educators' and their low expectations.

To conclude, these findings make visible the intertwining of temporospatial legacies and other DefectCraft practices that contributed to racial,

linguistic and ability segregation and educational inequalities. Keeping Lakeview's historical and contextual complexities as a backdrop, we describe in the next section how district staff explained a pattern of recurring disproportionality citations.

Explaining Citations: Cartographies of Damaged Bodies, Expectation Mismatches, and Color-Evasiveness

The increasing diversity of the district was touted as one of its primary strengths. Stakeholders in the district described the "changing demographics" of Lakeview as a clear departure from the type of schools they attended growing up, which was often described as a welcome change. Although diversity in the district was initially discussed as an "asset," this embrace was primarily done in a cursory fashion, given the many contradictions that we identified when educators' practices and beliefs about students were examined in more detail. Aligned with the spatial opportunity structures we identified participants' perspectives were shaped in large part by the district's relationship with the adjacent urban community—Center City—the historically Black, working-class community.

The demographic changes brought about substantial transformations and challenges to Lakeview, including multiple citations for disproportionality. A school administrator described Lakeview as a "high-performing district with an increasing—I don't wanna say challenging, but student population whose needs have certainly changed over the past 10 to 15 years." The administrator went on to explain:

> I think, maybe, if I were to pinpoint it, it might be an adjusting of expectations. I think that would be on both parts. . . . It's an adjustment of expectations on the staff's part, in understanding and dealing with students from different backgrounds than they may be accustomed to, if they've been working here for 15 to 30 years. I think it's an adjustment on the students' part, in being new in a district, in a community, and understanding those expectations, as opposed to where they may have been previously.

In fact, staff explanations of disproportionality were articulated in the language of DefectCraft. We found that district staff's narratives of academic achievement and ability differences were braided in spatial dynamics that reified a "damaged imagery," which historically portrays Black students and other minoritized groups as psychologically, emotionally, and socially defective (Scott, 2007). A common belief was that troubling student behavior was a result of being "at-risk" due to students' family backgrounds and poverty. When asked who "at risk" students were, a high school teacher shared,

> I would put all of our kids who receive special education services, the ELL [English Language Learners] kids just because they're dealing with

> a separate set of challenges, and then at-risk kids as far as behavior that . . . for whatever reason are not able to function.

These beliefs sustained a DefectCraft ethos through the hierarchization of group categories, the justification of segregation, and the naturalization of disproportionality. Specifically, many district staff believed that the citation was the result of families from neighboring urban communities moving into Lakeview—what was described as a challenge given their status as a "first-ring" suburb of a major city. One district leader used a spatial framing to describe Center City families and schools:

> Well, we're a first-ring suburb so we're on the border of Center City. I think there's a tremendous amount of dysfunction in Center City public schools right now. A lot of folks see [Lakeview] geographically as a better alternative to where they are, in terms of safety and the future of their kids. I think, also, we have a pretty good reputation of being a district that promotes diversity and tolerance as well as the high academic standards. . . . They're well-meaning, well-intentioned parents who want something better for their children. Because I think it's been pretty highly documented in this area, in the media, and in the paper, that the Center City schools are dysfunctional and failing.

Indeed, many educators relied on deficit perspectives as they tried to make sense of the citations. To illustrate, a high school special education teacher rationalized the disproportionality citations as the product of academically challenged schools in Center City, where families were looking for something more for their children. Consistent with DefectCraft practices, the teacher went on to connect geography to ability by explaining, "when a lot of the urban creep started and we were seeing a lot of kids coming from the city, they would come into our classes and they couldn't keep up." The work of DefectCraft is reflected in the teacher's *othering* language ("*they* would come into *our* classes"), the construction of student identities through spatialized considerations and a deficit discourse. When explaining the recurrent citations, staff consistently targeted City Center students and their families assembling spatial and cultural-historical factors to craft deficit-laden student academic identities and problematic family cultures.

In turn, students tended to have a more ambiguous view on discipline disparities. One Black student shared, "we have some students that [were] at Center City public schools, and some of those students bring those bad habits to Lakeview, and I believe that is why they get kicked out." The student later elaborated, however, about how there were also times when students were unfairly disciplined in the district based on race:

> Like my friend [who is Black], he used to go to another high school in Center City, but that school is getting shut down, and so he was wearing a hoodie, and he was about to take it off, like he was just coming in through the front door, and the assistant principal, he was like, "Why

> do you have your hoodie on in the school?" And he [the friend] got detention on the spot.

On the one hand, some students shared the staff's deficit view about learners from Center City, but also acknowledged (based on personal experiences) disciplinary inequities based on race. The disparities these students witnessed aligned with district data showing an association between the growth in the number of students of color and an increase in suspensions (see Table 1).

DefectCraft deficit beliefs about race, ability, and academic preparedness were juxtaposed to Lakeview's unique culture in district staff's explanations about disproportionality. That is, educators strongly believed that the district's "high expectations" contributed to challenges new students of color from the neighboring urban community faced. These challenges included issues related to academic ability and discipline. For instance, an administrator involved in school discipline described what he perceived as the growing challenge of students from Center City moving into Lakeview:

> How many are transferred in from, let's say, Center City, where expectations and culture is a little bit different than what we provide and what we expect here? 'Cause, unfortunately, we do have higher expectations and higher standards for our students than Center City, which is shown through our testing, and through our attendance rate. Looking at that data, I'd actually like to see how many of our students have actually gone through our entire school system, and then be able to chunk that. Because I think when a student transfers into our building, and our expectations are set a little bit higher, some of those people are caught off guard. Then you will have to question, is this an appropriate setting for them to be transferring [into], if they're a student with special—a special education, or if they're just a Black student in general?

Notice DefectCraft's othering language in this illustrative statement that permeated the views of many leaders and educators—for example, "higher standards for *our* students"; "*our* attendance rate"; "*our* expectations"; "some of *those people* are caught off guard"; "is this an appropriate setting for *them*" (emphases added). DefectCraft's comparative ideology was deployed to contrast these students' deficits and inadequate home cultures with the district's culture of high expectations. A school principal offered an additional example:

> It's hard . . . I talk about having high expectations when we have some kids who come in and they're in third grade. They transfer in and they don't know how to read. Are they special education? I don't know. Or have they just had a really *poor academic experience* and really *no home support*? [emphases added]

DefectCraft's "cultural" argument was used in the context of students' homes (as in the preceding example) as well as to describe students' values and cultural practices. A high school administrator captured this perspective when focusing on lack of "respect" in today's "culture":

> Unfortunately, in today's society, I don't think that our culture really comes from a generation, from parenting, from what they see in society and what they experience, that respect is something that needs to be done. That's a challenge I see every single day, especially with authority. Our students question; they don't feel that it's wrong to question a teacher. They don't feel it's wrong to be argumentative towards an adult within the building, and those are some challenges in order—that I see, just with the simple character education trait, is respect.

The administrator's focus on students' lack of "character" and "respect" exemplified the subtle ways DefectCraft's damage imagery was propagated across the district, which was even more troubling coming from an administrator who wielded considerable power to discipline students.

Despite this principal participating in culturally responsive training offered by the district, deep-seated cultural archetypes of Black students and their families were used to consolidate DefectCraft's work. These processes affirmed deficit assumptions about the nature of this racial group and its traits, particularly with regard to the ability level of Center City students. Through these rhetorical moves, Lakeview staff engaged in the practice of Black abstraction by erasing the complex contextual influences that shaped inequitable spatial opportunity structures in Center City schools (Ross, 1990).

The favored "expectation mismatch" explanation was a core thread in DefectCraft's work at Lakeview, which, incidentally, enabled the staff to exercise White innocence—"the insistence on the innocence of contemporary Whites" (Ross, 1990, p. 2)—as it did free them from having responsibility for the recurring citations. At the same time, the district staff were in a bind as they wanted to ensure the needs of students and their families in the wealthier (and White) parts of the district were being met, while also, often in questionable ways, trying to meet the needs of its growing diversity.

An insidious feature of DefectCraft is that it engages with race (in problematic ways), while it obscures the role of racism. We found instances, however, in which DefectCraft was disrupted. A staff member, for instance, made visible the role of racism in the district and the inertia it engendered. She spun an alternative version of the "different expectations" theory by saying,

> I think that [White teachers and leaders] expectations are different. I think that the lenses that they look at [students of color] through are different. They're not favorable . . . I got my lily White, good old boy system of administrators. I got my lily White, good old boy system of

> teachers. Racism is so entrenched in the system and what's the incentive to change?

This critical stance regarding race, however, was not widely reflected in interviews with school leaders and staff. In fact, consistent with DefectCraft ideology, we found that color-evasive perspectives were largely unquestioned and embraced throughout the district, particularly because it was perceived as an impartial practice that should be lauded. Again, this strengthened a color-evasive stance and obscured the role of racism. This was illustrated in the views of a number of teachers who were conflicted about whether there was in fact segregation, or whether segregation was simply a result of the type of self-sorting mechanisms students and families "naturally" engaged in. These teachers held on to this view despite the histories of citations and racial segregation in the district and surrounding communities.

Several DefectCraft processes, such as legitimization, sustained a color-evasive vision in the district (Lamont & Pierson, 2019). A middle school administrator, for example, discussed the disproportionality citation related to school discipline by saying,

> Are people being prejudicial in the way they write people up? Is that subgroup just more likely to misbehave? I try not to focus on that to be honest with you. I handle [it] as a school disciplinarian. I'm charged with handling the referrals that are sent my way. I pride myself on handling all referrals that are sent my way and holding every student accountable to our code of conduct, but also treating every student as an individual.

While the administrator did not speak explicitly about race, he implicitly conveyed not "seeing race" in his equal treatment philosophy. Moreover, he legitimized (Lamont & Pierce, 2019) the inequality in school disciplinary practices by "holding every student accountable to our code of conduct." Similarly, a special education teacher from Holbrook legitimized the citations when she stated,

> The one person this year that has spent two lunch periods in the principal's office for non-completion of homework—you know, you get three warnings and then you have to go and do it during lunch—is Black. I mean that's just—it is what it is.

This teacher used the school policies and rules to legitimize the practice of sending a Black student to the principal's office without interrogating why or whether there were other practices to support the student, particularly given the challenges the district faced with citations for disproportionality and school discipline. These illustrations of DefectCraft processes show how race was made *invisible* ("hold every student accountable") and *visible* ("the person that . . . spent . . . lunch periods in the principal's office . . . is

Black") to explain disproportionality while racism is pushed backstage (Artiles, 2019a).

District staff also used quantification arguments (Lamont & Pierson, 2019) to justify disproportionality. The principal of Holbrook Elementary illustrated quantification's reliance on metrics to reproduce DefectCraft:

> I think that data piece is pretty critical in terms of taking a deeper look at that. The other thing would be . . . and I don't know whether this is the case or not, but having pre-thought-out consequences, so that way if A happens, then the result is this. If B happens, then the result is this, and really kind of, if you will, having a menu of behavioral responses, or responses to behavior, based on what that offense is. I think one of the things that's critical is to be consistent when responding to any behavior.

In this logic, racial disparities are not the result of inconsistencies (i.e., differential treatment) in the application of behavioral rules. Rather they merely mirror the application of systematic rules and metrics that are "equally" applied to everyone. Hence, the tally of infractions merely reflects reality. But Lamont and Pierson (2019) remind us that quantification is not consistently just: "What looks like fairness and the rewarding of merit may in fact compound existing inequalities" (p. 9). A fundamental challenge for this principal and the rest of the district staff was to disentangle their assumptions about description and interpretation. More specifically, they needed to come to the realization that numbers are not only descriptive; "numbers are interpretive, for they embody theoretical assumptions about what should be counted" (Poovey, 1998, p. xii), and that the descriptive representations of numbers are crafted from social contexts that demand interpretive work (Artiles, 2019a). Metrics do not necessarily guarantee equality.

Responding to Citations: Compliance as Procedure in District Responses

Thus far, we documented Lakeview's historical and cultural contexts and the ways staff explained a pattern of recurrent disproportionality citations. Next, we examine how Lakeview staff responded to the citations as a means to gain a contextualized understanding of policy compliance by drawing attention to the space between the formal dimension of organizations (monitoring rules and procedures) and everyday enactments in practice (Edelman & Talesh, 2011).

Similar to the explanations of disproportionality, district staff responses were grounded in DefectCraft processes that produced defective identities (prejudiced teachers), marshalled symbolic remedies that framed the problem in abstract terms, and obscured the role of structural racism (Lamont & Pierson, 2019). We found that district staff's responses were, in part, due to ambiguous policy regulations, especially given that IDEA guidelines do not

provide standard metrics for determining the presence of the problem, and compliance is ill defined (Cavendish et al., 2014).

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 required districts to use 15% of funds from their CEIS to address disproportionality. Given Lakeview's fluctuating citation patterns, in addition to conducting an audit of their policies and procedures, one of the primary ways district leadership used their CEIS funds was adopting culturally responsive practices training (CRPT) with guidance from a regional technical assistance center. District and school leaders pointed to three additional ways they used CEIS funds—including hiring a special education teacher to ensure students in the In-School-Suspension (ISS) classroom had appropriate supports, adding academic supports after school, and adopting a computer program focused on promoting social-emotional development to improve student behaviors. Nonetheless, leaders emphasized that the most important response to the citation was CRPT. Indeed, many staff described CRPT as the district's "cornerstone initiative" to improve equity in the school, particularly as a response to disproportionality. Grounded in a DefectCraft perspective, these initial responses forged flawed identities (i.e., biased teachers) thus, locating the problem in prejudiced teachers and students' developmental deficits.

The district hired a nationally recognized consultant to develop a 3-day CRPT that was offered once a year and worked with a university partner to further develop and implement the program. District leaders described CRPT as a pedagogical training focused on improving the practices of teachers and bringing critical awareness about racial disparities to district educators. As described by district leaders, the goal of CRPT was to build community trust within the district, improve cultural awareness, advocate for social justice, and engage in systemic transformation. Of particular importance was an emphasis on teaching and leading in a way that more groups of students could, as one district leader explained, "achieve at a higher level and engage at a deeper level." During the 3-day workshop, participants engaged in group activities to learn about how to build authentic relationships with students across differences, understand how to ensure learning environments were "culturally inviting," and examine concepts such as White privilege and White supremacy. Missing, however, was an interrogation of intersectional racism and ableism broadly and an examination of the struggles the district faced regarding disproportionality in identification and discipline policies and practices more specifically.

The district organized CRPT as a yearly professional development for approximately 20 teachers, staff, or leaders to participate out of approximately 300 staff. Initially, specific individuals were targeted who district leaders believed would benefit from the training that focused on cultural awareness, but later leaders decided to make participation voluntary and open due to negative feedback that some faculty were unfairly required to take the training, rather than making it optional and open to all faculty and staff. A district

administrator described the purpose of the CRPT program as "trying to get everyone on the same playing field in terms of understanding our biases, understanding institutionalized racism, and understanding that our students aren't doing as well in certain populations." Indeed, for many it was, as they described it, an "incredible experience" and a time when their "eyes were opened." The superintendent described it this way:

> It was an incredible experience. I think I'm a pretty self-reflective person. I always thought of myself as being extremely nonjudgmental, open, and open to diversity; I learned a lot about my own personal biases and how I view the world. . . . Then from that, I think I just kinda became even stronger on my mission to make sure . . . we're a culturally sensitive school.

The superintendent's sentiment about the value of CRPT represents many district- and school-level leaders who embraced CRPT as the primary "fix" for improving equity outcomes for students of color in the district, and for responding to racial disproportionality. We found that for many, particularly special educators across schools, the training was embraced. One high school special education teacher shared:

> I also think the culturally responsive teaching effort that we've made has made a big difference because I think people are just more aware and more sensitive to what they're doing and that it isn't necessarily the kids. When everybody thinks that there's something wrong with the kid, and really there's something wrong with you, or there's something different you can do.

The key distinction the teacher made was that the problem resided in part in the interpretations and reactions of teachers, and not the students. In the end, however, the CRPT and other measures constituted managerial responses to the citation that signaled compliance. In this way, the leaders in the district, however well meaning, "created symbolic legal structures [that] served as visible indicia of attention to the law, which offered legitimacy benefits to the [district]. . . . These structures allowed for compliance in form, without requiring much substantive change to the workplace environment" (Edelman & Talesh, 2011, p. 108). The equity goals of IDEA regulations were diluted as the district built in discretion or rules to evade the managerial responses purportedly created to comply with the policy (Edelman & Suchman, 1999).

The emphasis on CRPT suggested the solution was to fix deficit-laden identities (prejudiced staff), leaving unexamined how their newly gained abstract understandings of personal racial biases connected with institutional considerations related to opportunity to learn, referral processes, behavioral and assessment assumptions and norms, and critically significant, a past of racial and socioeconomic tensions in the community and the district. As Krieger et al. (2015) reminds us, "Organizations adopt antidiscrimination

policies, but often decouple their formal policies from their informal practice'' (p. 846). In the end, the role of power is obscured and inequalities are maintained. Transition came about through the recognition of racial biases among staff; however, the racist underpinnings of institutional norms and practices that produced and maintained disproportionality were unaltered, a manifestation of White innocence (Ross, 1990).

As documented above, Lakeview and its surrounding communities experienced significant demographic changes in the preceding years. These developments brought greater diversity in race, language background, and socioeconomic status, while IDEA regulations for identification and interventions remained ambiguous. In addition, established school policies and practices stayed largely stagnant despite the changing characteristics and needs of the student population. Although our document analysis revealed some efforts to account for demographic shifts with, for example, professional development activities focused on how to identify emergent bilinguals with disabilities, the majority of professional development activities were color-evasive. This included a focus on behavioral interventions, creating safe schools, and how to engage in alternatives to suspension. The high school principal exemplified a common view among participants when he explained the training helped him with the ''obvious self-awareness that, in general, we are White teachers teaching Black students. [And as such] we have to learn how to calibrate some of our styles.'' Notice how DefectCraft's othering language in the principal's discourse (us/them) retraced the boundaries of the notion of a Lakeview ''family.'' In this sense, we did not find evidence of substantial efforts to bridge the distance between existing regulations and practices and the evolving sociodemographic conditions of the district. Overall, the district's responses to the citations were unclear and hesitant, which was partly the result of the alternative (and polarizing) staff responses to the district's citations. As a staff member stated, ''I think we talk the talk, but we don't walk the walk.''

Discussion

In this study, we focused on an enduring educational equity paradox, namely, racial disparities in disability identification and discipline sanctions. IDEA requires monitoring this paradox, but research suggests ''states underreport, fail to report, or face a lack of severe penalties or sanctions when found to have significant disproportionality within the state'' (Strassfeld, 2017, p. 1127). There is an alarming scarcity of evidence about the aftermath of disproportionality citations. What can be learned from school district contexts where there is a documented problem? What are local actors' interpretations of and responses to these sanctions? These are the issues and questions that animated this study. The findings reported in this study convey three messages.

1. Educators' explanations and responses to citations must be examined in the cultural-historical and sociospatial contexts of school districts and communities

Multiple disproportionality studies relying on large datasets have painted a mixed picture of complex interactions that vary by disability category, race, school location, school demographic profiles, and types of covariates and predictors, such as socioeconomic status (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Shifrer, 2018). While there are important caveats germane to the nature of datasets and analytical approaches used in these and other quantitative studies (Skiba et al., 2016), one message consistently emerges from these findings: Disproportionality patterns are associated with the racial and socioeconomic contexts of districts and schools, yet we have a dearth of evidence on how these contextual influences shape stakeholders' explanations and responses to racial disparities.

We documented the ways legacies of race relations and socioeconomic stratification played a role in district staff's understandings of disproportionality citations. Despite the spatial proximity to the predominately low-income, racially diverse school district of Center City, Lakeview staff neither had experience educating students of color nor understood these communities. DefectCraft othering discourse and practices mediated staff's explanations and responses to recurrent racial disparities. To illustrate, the Lakeview parents and staff had crafted a cohesive vision of their community; in fact, staff alluded to the Lakeview "family" to describe themselves. But this strong collective identity was spatialized, and it was evident that students of color were not included in this vision and were regarded as newcomers and outsiders. The relative representation of racial groups in schools can contribute to disproportionality (Fish, 2019).

Interestingly, the centrality of race and poverty in staff's explanations was not necessarily reflected in district-wide measures of segregation (unevenness), as evidenced in Lakeview's dissimilarity indices during this time period (see Table 2). This is not surprising given research that within-school segregation is increasing compared to between district segregation (Clotfelter et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the contrast between the racial distancing and contempt in district staff's views and the relatively low levels of racial unevenness was puzzling and offers a nuanced perspective on the racial climate of the district. In this sense, although measures of racial segregation (unevenness) were not pronounced in Lakeview, historical legacies of a racial divide permeated district staff's explanations.

Additionally, district leadership used managerial language—for example, reduce teachers' travel time between schools—to relegate emergent bilinguals and students with disabilities (who substantially intersected with racialized learners) to a specific space (i.e., Morningstar Elementary) under an equity argument: to ensure the efficient delivery of much-needed services. Not surprisingly, students of color and discipline sanctions at the elementary

level were concentrated at this school. As we noted in the findings, these practices impacted educational opportunities.

To summarize, the use of a situated lens that accounts for cultural-historical and spatial influences enabled us to document a nuanced representation of staff's understandings and responses to disproportionality. A DefectCraft perspective illuminated the spatial fluidity and situated nature of race and disability and the consequences on minoritized learners. Our findings call for a closer scrutiny of the histories of local dynamics to understand how race becomes spatialized (Razack, 2002) and produces particular identities for certain groups that rest upon such spaces (Phillips, 1997). Future studies should examine disability-race intersections with a focus on organizational cultures in districts and schools to detail the local conditions and historical factors that exacerbate or neutralize disproportionality patterns.

2. Explanations of citations were grounded in a spatialized damaged imagery of students of color

Most school staff and leaders endorsed a particular explanation for the multiple disproportionality citations that Lakeview received in the preceding years. Consistent with a DefectCraft perspective, they envisioned Center City's students of color as damaged, an identity that was predominately bestowed upon Black students, though emergent bilingual students were also included. The explanation's main tenet was the mismatch between Lakeview's higher expectations and the perception that students of color were unable to meet the district's requirements. A masked supposition of this rationalization was that these students' failure was due to City Center schools' lower expectations and culturally impoverished homes.

It is important to note that staff's explanations and responses seemed intent in erasing the intersections of disability with race or language. This logic followed a particular sequence: (a) Black children *are* defective, academically weak, and/or behaviorally uncontrolled; (2) students with disabilities are academically weak and unruly children need specialized interventions to advance their education; and (3) Black children must be disabled or out of control and should be placed in special education or suspended. Notice (2) presumably requires a distribution of resources that promises positive effects. But the DefectCraft damaged imagery used to essentialize Black children was undisputed in staff explanations. There was no acknowledgement of the possibility that Black communities, families and children had assets or cultural resources. In turn, the promise of resources distributed to support Black children (i.e., a disability diagnosis or corrective discipline measures) was destabilized as they were deployed to segregate and reduce educational opportunity.

DefectCraft entails historical sedimentations that contextualize how these spatialized damaged identities were manufactured and reproduced. The assembling of difference markers (race, ethnicity, gender, social class) with

disability to sustain a damaged imagery has a long and deep ancestry (Baynton, 2005). Moreover, DefectCraft was instantiated through a set of practices fueled by a color-evasive ideology that produced unstable formations such as race and disability and their intersections, making them visible and invisible across contexts and situations, while precluding engagement with racism and ableism. Specifically, race was made visible through the official body count by disability and the racial bias reduction training but vanished in damage imagery through a poverty or low academic performance justification. Race was also invisible in explanations of the decision-making processes that enforced rules and procedures—for example, disability diagnosis criteria and discipline codes apply equally to all. Race mattered and did not matter given ambiguous monitoring regulations. This challenge emerged in Lakeview in part because of IDEA's ambiguities in monitoring regulations. The perverse consequence of this logic is that race becomes raceless because it ignores the asymmetrical nature of race—but as Cheryl Harris (2001) reminds us, "Applying a rule of symmetrical treatment to conditions which are fundamentally unequal actually reproduces inequality" (p. 1775).

DefectCraft materialized in district's everyday practices that were grounded in damaged imagery. As we reported above, several social mechanisms were used to reinforce disproportionality's inequities. For instance, staff legitimized the problem by explaining that the impartial application of district policies and procedures to all students produced a distribution of infractions. Relying on the mechanism of quantification, staff concluded that the tally of such violations merely reflected the reality of Lakeview's student body. Thus, disproportionality was naturalized.

Future disproportionality research and interventions must situate the problem in the broader contexts of social injustice—that is, the economic and social structures that create poverty and disability. Similarly, future studies must be grounded in more fluid notions of space that capture not only the physical spaces that surround students of color and educators, but also the sociocultural spatial dimensions of everyday school practices. Of significance, a way to begin disrupting the work of DefectCraft is to examine not only the social *positions* of individuals with disabilities (e.g., across intersections with language, social class, race), but also their social *positioning*—that is, "how individuals come to be 'raced,' 'classed' and 'gendered' in relation to [DefectCraft] processes" (Morrison, 2012, p. 135, emphasis in original). These theoretical and analytic shifts will enable investigators to frame future research using a geography of opportunity perspective.

3. District responses to disproportionality's complexities and the ambiguity of policy mandates constituted symbolic gestures that signaled compliance

The present study contributes to a new generation of disproportionality research grounded in a situated perspective about a neglected aspect of this

problem. The deployment of a situated perspective to study the *consequences* of disproportionality enabled us to document the limits of symbolic fixes that painted a façade of legal compliance. District staff struggled to explain the persistence of disproportionality and make sense of IDEA's compliance requirements. Specifically, the district carried out two lines of responses, namely, racial bias and pedagogical training for staff and remedies to fix students' deficits. Aligned with DefectCraft's damage imagery, locating the causes of disproportionality in prejudiced teachers and students and families was an expedient way to generate responses to the citations. This led to a focus on "fixing" teachers and children's academic or behavioral challenges rather than encouraging critical reflection about how broader social and contextual factors (e.g., community race relations) and organizational contexts contributed to disproportionality.

Although it is laudable that district leaders aimed to develop a more critical stance on race, inequality, and opportunity with the enactment of CRPT, the district continued to struggle with fluctuating citations, while quarrels ensued about the meaning of the policy and the district's efforts to build capacity through the training. Moreover, in line with the notion of Black abstraction, the CRPT mostly framed the problem in abstract terms calling attention to staff's racial biases and erasing the humanness and sociocultural realities of learners of color. We learned that power struggles permeated some staff's resistance to the CRPT. Underlying these tensions were disparate interpretations of the problem and opinions about the appropriateness of district responses to citations. Staff resistance to CRPT was spatially distributed across the district and shaped by its history of racial tension. Ultimately, district leadership yielded to their demands and made the training optional. In the end, the district responses were largely inadequate in addressing racial disparities and the underlying social mechanisms encoded in staff's responses reproduced a spatial opportunity structure. The district leadership engaged the ambiguity of the disproportionality policy through the creation of structures (policies, rules, procedures) "in [a symbolic] attempt to achieve legal legitimacy" (Edelman & Talesh, 2011, p. 107). Paradoxically, responses to citations represented both *advancement* (through the recognition of racial biases) and *continuity* (by ignoring the institutional layers that contributed to citations) in the struggle over disproportionality.

To a significant extent, the staff's technical perspective of policy collided with the superficial nature of an equity-oriented framework which was decontextualized from important sociohistorical forces, thus rendering IDEA ineffective in addressing disproportionality. As we begin to understand how districts, schools, and school actors explain and respond to policies aimed at improving equity, it will also be necessary to conduct studies premised on the tenet that "legality is an ongoing structure of social action" (Silbey, 2005, p. 328). The next generation of this research can record the potential mediating roles of race, gender, social class, and language in how

school staff, students, and families understand experientially these equity policies and responses to citations. It is plausible there is variability in interpretations of disproportionality citations and understanding this variance will be insightful. This is critical given evidence that even full compliance with the law can lead to manipulations that reduce the intended benefits of compliance and genuine transformation (Saatcioglu & Skrtic, 2019). Situating social actors' interpretive processes and actions related to disproportionality policy in their organizational, legal, and cultural-historical contexts will enable researchers to account for the moral dimension of this long-standing inequity in education.

ORCID iDs

Alfredo J. Artiles https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5772-0787
Catherine Kramarczuk Voulgarides https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7649-8058

Notes

The authors are grateful to the William T. Grant foundation (Grant Number 184607) for their support in conducting this study.

The authors are thankful to Kris Gutierrez, Christopher Cormier, and Lok-Sze Wong for their generous and insightful feedback on earlier versions of this article.

[1]States have tremendous latitude to develop a formula for determining identification and discipline racial disparities that triggers disproportionality, which contributes to lack of clarity and uniformity across states (Cavendish et al., 2014). This includes what peer groups are used for determining disproportionality.

[2]The term *subjective disabilities* includes categories that require substantial interpretations and judgments from professionals when making diagnostic decisions. These include learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and emotional disturbances.

[3]This dual nature does not constitute a binary because disability's facets are neither mutually exclusive nor equivalent. Indeed, people may benefit from specialized supports, but still get stigmatized by a disability label; marginalization may mitigate the benefits of identification and vice versa.

[4]The notion of DefectCraft was inspired in part by the seminal contributions of RaceCraft (Fields & Fields, 2012), though other theoretical ideas complement this work as indicated in the references. Like Racecraft, DefectCraft entails social processes that muddle the underlying role of power in the formation of differences. Racecraft focuses on racism and race as an inherent group trait, ignoring the contextual influences that invoke race as difference. Racecraft was conceptualized with a broad scope covering racism in multiple spheres of life in U.S. society from economics to politics and everyday life. DefectCraft is grounded in the educational arena and is concerned with the formation of intersectional differences. Specifically, DefectCraft intensifies the stratification of marginalized groups—for example, by virtue of their race or language—by adding defects and deficiencies to their identities. These defects are assembled as disabilities—a major category of marginalization. Unlike Racecraft, DefectCraft is explicitly concerned with intersectional identities of difference and considers race, disability, and associated deficiencies intrinsic to group ontologies. Although Racecraft is less clear on this point, DefectCraft envisions research as a sociocultural practice and, thus, it approaches the analysis of racial disparities from a situated perspective. Racecraft draws theoretical insights primarily from history and sociology; DefectCraft builds on Racecraft, but it is also informed by related sociological scholarship on inequality, critical race theory (including intersectionality), ethnic studies, social studies of science, and disability studies. DefectCraft contributes to the emergent body of work on

social, cultural-historical, and critical approaches to disability (e.g., critical disability studies, DisCrit, Learning Lab) (Annamma et al., 2013; Artiles, 2003; Bal et al., 2018; Banks, 2018; Cioè-Peña; 2021; Padilla, 2021).

[5]Ideologies are "about meaning in the service of power" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 25). Dominant groups use ideologies to maintain an existing state of affairs. Racial ideologies use frames or "set paths for interpreting information" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 26). *Colorblind ideology* is the frame used to ignore, deny, or erase the role, meaning, or impact of race in a racially stratified society. We use the term *colorblindness* interchangeably with *color-evasiveness*, though we recognize there are subtle distinctions between these terms. Colorblindness calls attention to the role of ideology that circulates in systems of meanings, policies and practices, categories, perceptual frames, and interpretive lenses. Colorblindness is a floating signifier that does not primarily depend on a person's deliberate erasure of race. Color-evasiveness is also concerned with omitting race but may be interpreted as an actor's volition to evade, and thus, it might unwittingly have a narrower meaning and field of action. Both terms have shortcomings—colorblindness' ableist undertones and color evasiveness' potentially narrower semiotic reach. We use both to leverage their complementary and critical meanings.

[6]This article reports findings from a larger mixed methods project, which consisted of (a) a quantitative study (under review) examining contextual factors in suburban school districts related to racial disproportionality in special education and (b) a qualitative portion that consisted of two case studies. One case study was published by the authors in 2021. This article is based on the second case study. Key differences exist between the two case studies given distinctions in contextual factors (e.g., sociodemographic, historical, political) that shaped responses to disproportionality citations.

[7]All district and school names are pseudonyms.

[8]Our study team consisted of one Black woman (lead author), one Latina (fifth author), one Latino (second author), and two White women (third and fourth authors). Notably, we each have experience working with diverse learners with disabilities in schools and afterschool programs in urban, suburban, and rural settings in the United States and other nations of the global South and North. Collectively, we have training and expertise in special education, sociology of education, critical legal and policy studies, and sociocultural theory to examine racial disparities in special education. Taken together, our experiences inform our positionalities and understandings of the need to consider critical perspectives related to racial disparities in special education. Consistent with professional ethics, the authorship order reflects each team member's contribution to the project.

[9]To protect the anonymity of the school district and community, we have included anonymized sources.

References

Ahram, R., Fergus, E., & Noguera, P. (2011). Addressing racial/ethnic disproportionality in special education: Case studies of suburban school districts. *Teachers College Record*, *113*, 2233–2266. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811111301004

Albrecht, S. F., Skiba, R. J., Losen, D. J., Chung, C., & Middelberg, L. (2012). Federal policy on disproportionality in special education: Is it moving us forward? *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *23*(1), 14–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207311407917

Annamma, S. A., Connor, D., & Ferri, B. (2013). Dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit): Theorizing at the intersections of race and dis/ability. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *16*(1), 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.730511

Annamma, S., & Jackson, E. (2017). Conceptualizing color-evasiveness: Using dis/ability critical race theory to expand a color-blind racial ideology in education and society. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *20*(2), 147–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1248837

Artiles, A. J. (2003). Special education's changing identity: Paradoxes and dilemmas in views of culture and space. *Harvard Educational Review*, *73*, 164–202. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.73.2.j78t573x377j7106

Artiles, A. J. (2011). Toward an interdisciplinary understanding of educational equity and difference: The case of the racialization of ability. *Educational Researcher*, *40*, 431–445. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X11429391

Artiles, A. J. (2013). Untangling the racialization of disabilities: An intersectionality critique across disability models. *DuBois Review*, *10*, 329–347. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X13000271

Artiles, A. J. (2019). 14th annual Brown Lecture in Education Research—Re-envisioning equity research: Disability identification disparities as a case in point. *Educational Researcher*, *48*, 325–335. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19871949

Artiles, A. J. (2022). Interdisciplinary notes on the dual nature of disability: Disrupting ideology-ontology circuits in racial disparities research. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/23813377221120106

Artiles, A. J., Dorn, S., & Bal, A. (2016). Objects of protection, enduring nodes of difference: Disability intersections with "other" differences, 1916 – 2016. *Review of Research in Education*, *40*, 777–820. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16680606

Bal, A., Afacan, K., & Cakir, H. (2018) Culturally responsive school discipline: Implementing learning lab at a high school for systemic transformation. *American Educational Research Journal*, *55*(5), 1007–1050. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218768796

Banks, J. (2018). Invisible man: The significance of context when examining race, gender and disability. *Disability & Society*, *33*(6), 894–908. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2018.1456912

Baynton, D. (2005). Defectives in the land: Disability and American immigration policy, 1882-1924. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, *24*(3), 31–44.

Benjamin, R. (2014). Conjuring difference, concealing inequality: A brief tour of Racecraft. *Theory and Society*, *43*, 683–688. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-014-9238-z

Benjamin, R. (2017). Cultura obscura: Race, power, and "culture talk" in the health sciences. *American Journal of Law & Medicine*, *43*(2–3), 225–238. https://doi.org/10.1177/0098858817723661

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States. *Science and Society*, *70*(3), 431–434.

Cavendish, W., Artiles, A. J., & Harry, B. (2014). Tracking inequality 60 years after Brown: Does policy legitimize the racialization of disability? *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners*, *14*(2), 30–40. https://doi.org/10.5555/2158-396X.14.2.30

Cioè-Peña, M. (2021). TrUDL: The intersectional possibilities of translanguaging and universal design for learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, Online First. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3074

Clotfelter, C. T., Hemelt, S. W., Ladd, H. F., & Turaeva, M. (2018). *School segregation in the era of immigration, school choice, and color-blind jurisprudence: The case of North Carolina*. National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. https://caldercenter.org/sites/default/files/CALDER%20WP%20198-0618-2_0.pdf

Collins, K. M., Connor, D., Ferri, B., Gallagher, D., & Samson, J. (2016). Dangerous assumptions and unspoken limitations: A disability studies in education response to Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, Mattison, Maczuga, Li, & Cook (2015). *Multiple Voices*, *16*(1), 4–16. https://doi.org/10.5555/2158-396X.16.1.4

Cruz, R. A., Firestone, A. R., & Rodl, J. E. (2021). Disproportionality reduction in exclusionary school discipline: A best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research, 91*(3), 397–431.

Cruz, R. A., & Rodl, J. E. (2018). An integrative synthesis of literature on disproportionality in special education. *Journal of Special Education*, *52*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466918758707

Darity, W., Jr. (2011). Revisiting the debate on race and culture: The new (incorrect) Harvard/Washington consensus on racial inequality. *DuBois Review*, *8*, 467–495. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X11000439

Diamond, J. B., Posey-Maddox, L., & Velázquez, M. D. (2021). Reframing suburbs: Race, place, and opportunity in suburban education spaces. *Educational Researcher*, *50*(4), 249–255. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20972676

Donovan, S. M., & Cross, C. T. (2002). *Minority students in special and gifted education*. National Academies Press.

Edelman, L. B., & Suchman, M. C. (1999). When the "haves" hold court: Speculations on the organizational internalization of law. *Law & Society Review*, *33*(4), 941–991.

Edelman, L. B., & Talesh, S. A. (2011). To comply or not to comply—that isn't the question: How organizations construct the meaning of compliance. In C. Parker & V. L. Nielsen (Eds.), *Explaining compliance: Business responses to regulation* (pp. 103–122). Edward Elgar.

Eitle, T. M. (2002). Special education or racial segregation: Understanding variation in the representation of Black students in educable mentally handicapped programs. *The Sociological Quarterly, 43*(4), 575–605.

Erevelles, N., & Minear, A. (2010). Unspeakable offenses: Untangling race and disability in discourses of intersectionality. *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, *4*, 127–146.

Fields, K. E., & Fields, B. J. (2012). *Racecraft: The soul of inequality in American life*. Verso.

Fish, R. E. (2019). Standing out and sorting in: Exploring the role of racial composition in racial disparities in special education. *American Educational Research Journal, 56*(6), 2573–2608.

Galster, G., & Sharkey, P. (2017). Spatial foundations of inequality: A conceptual model and empirical overview. *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, *3*(2), 1–33.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2017). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Transaction Publishers.

Hancock, A. M. (2007). When multiplication doesn't equal quick addition: Examining intersectionality as a research paradigm. *Perspectives on Politics*, *5*(1), 63–79. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707070065

Harris, C. (2001). Equal treatment and the reproduction of inequality. *Fordham Law Review*, *69*, 1753–1783.

Harry, B., & Klingner, J. (2014). *Why are so many minority students in special education?* Teachers College Press.

Kramarczuk Voulgarides, C. (2018). *Does compliance matter in special education? IDEA and the hidden inequities of practice*. Teachers College Press.

Kramarczuk Voulgarides, C., Aylward, A., & Noguera, P. A. (2014). Elusive quest for equity: An analysis of how contextual factors contribute to the likelihood of school districts being legally cited for racial disproportionality in special education. *Journal of Law & Society*, *15*, 241.

Kramarczuk Voulgarides, C., Aylward, A., Tefera, A., Artiles, A. J., Alvarado, S. L., & Noguera, P. (2021). Unpacking the logic of compliance in special education: Contextual influences on discipline racial disparities in suburban schools. *Sociology of Education*, *94*(3), 208–226. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380407211013322

Krieger, L. H., Best, R. K., & Edelman, L. B. (2015). When "best practices" win, employees lose: Symbolic compliance and judicial inference in federal equal

employment opportunity cases. *Law & Social Inquiry*, *4*, 842–879. https://doi.org/10.1111/lsi.12116

Lamont, M., & Pierson, P. (2019). Inequality generation & persistence as multidimensional processes: An interdisciplinary agenda. *Daedalus*, *148*(3), 5–18. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01748

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.

Losen, D., & Martinez, P. (2021). *Lost opportunities: How disparate school discipline continues to drive differences in the opportunity to learn*. Learning Policy Institute; Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project, University of California, Los Angeles.

MacQueen, K. M., McLellan, E., Kay, K., & Milstein, B. (1998). Codebook development for team-based qualitative research. *Cultural Anthropology Methods Journal*, *10*(2), 31–36.

Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Harvard University Press.

Morgan, P., Farkas, G., Hillemeir, M. M., Mattison, R., Maczuga, S., Li, H., & Cook, M. (2015). Minorities are disproportionately underrepresented in special education: Longitudinal evidence across five disability conditions. *Educational Researcher*, *44*, 278–292. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X15591157

Morrison, A. (2012). If you are holding a degree in this country no-one's gonna ask no questions. In K. Bhopal & J. Preston (Eds.), *Intersectionality and "race" in education*. Routledge.

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2014). *Racial formation in the United States* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Oswald, D. P., Coutinho, M. J., & Best, A. M. (2002). Community and school predictors of overrepresentation of non-dominant children in special education. In D. J. Losen & G. Orfield (Eds.), *Racial inequity in special education* (pp. 1–13). Harvard Education Press.

Padilla, A. (2021). *Disability, intersectional agency, and Latinx identity: Theorizing LatDisCrit counterstories*. Routledge.

Philips, R. (1997). *Mapping men and empire: A geography of adventure*. Routledge.

Poovey, M. (1998). *A history of the modern fact*. University of Chicago Press.

powel, j., & Menendian, S. (2016). The problem of othering: Towards inclusiveness and belonging. *Othering and Belonging: Expanding the Circle of Human Concern*, *2*, 14–39.

Razack, S. H. (2002). When race becomes place. In S. H. Razack (Ed.), *Race, space, and the law: Unmapping a White settler society* (pp. 1–20). Between the Lines.

Ross, T. (1990). The rhetorical tapestry of race: White innocence and Black abstraction. *William and Mary Law Review*, *32*, 1–40.

Saatcioglu, A., & Skrtic, T. M. (2019). Categorization by organizations: Manipulation of disability categories in a racially desegregated school district. *American Journal of Sociology*, *125*(1), 184–260. https://doi.org/10.1086/703957

Scott, D. M. (2007). *Contempt & pity: Social policy and the image of the damaged Black psyche, 1889–1996*. University of North Carolina Press.

Shifrer, D. (2018). Clarifying the social roots of the disproportionate classification of racial minorities and males with learning disabilities. *Sociological Quarterly*, *59*, 384–406. https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2018.1479198

Shifrer, D., & Fish, R. (2020). A multilevel investigation into contextual reliability in the designation of cognitive health conditions among U.S. children. *Society and Mental Health*, *10*(2), 180–197. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156869319847243

Shifrer, D., & Frederick, A. (2019). Disability at the intersections. *Sociology Compass*, *13*(10). https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12733

Silbey, S. S. (2005). After legal consciousness. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, *1*, 323–368.

Skiba, R. J., Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E. B., Losen, D. J., & Harry, E. G. (2016). Risks and consequences of oversimplifying educational inequities: A response to Morgan et al. (2015). *Educational Researcher*, *45*(3), 221–225. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X16644606

Skiba, R. J., Chung, C. G., Trachok, M., Baker, T. L., Sheya, A., & Hughes, R. L. (2014). Parsing disciplinary disproportionality contributions of infraction, student, and school characteristics to out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *American Educational Research Journal*, *51*(4), 640–670. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831 214541670

Skiba, R. J., Simmons, A. B., Ritter, S., Gibb, M., Rausch, M. K., Cuadrado, J., & Chung, C.-G. (2008). Achieving equity in special education: History, status, and current challenges. *Exceptional Children*, *74*(3), 264–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290807400301

Skiba, R., Simmons, A., Ritter, S., Kohler, K., Henderson, M., & Wu, T. (2006). The context of minority disproportionality: Practitioner perspectives on special education referral. *Teachers College Record*, *108*, 1424–1459. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2006.00699.x

Strassfeld, N. M. (2017). The future of IDEA: Monitoring disproportionate representation of minority students in special education and intentional discrimination claims. *Case Western Reserve Law Review*, *67*, 1121–1151.

Sullivan, A. L., Van Norman, E. R., & Klingbeil, D. A. (2014). Exclusionary discipline of students with disabilities: Student and school characteristics predicting suspension. *Remedial and Special Education*, *35*(4), 199–210. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932513519825

Tate, W. F., IV. (2008). "Geography of opportunity": Poverty, place, and educational outcomes. *Educational Researcher*, *37*(7), 397–411. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08326409

Tefera, A. A., Siegel-Hawley, G., & Sjogren, A. L. (2022). The (in)visibility of race in school discipline across urban, suburban, and exurban contexts. *Teachers College Record*, 01614681221093282.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2018). QuickFacts. https://www.usa.gov/statistics#item-36987

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Fact sheet: Equity in IDEA*. https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-equity-idea

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights Data Collection. (2011). https://ocrdata.ed.gov/DistrictSchoolSearch#schoolSearch

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. (2017). *Significant disproportionality (Equity in IDEA)*. https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-equity-idea

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2013). *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Standards needed to improve identification of racial and ethnic overrepresentation in special education: Report to the Chairman, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, U.S. Senate*. Author.

Waitoller, F. R., Artiles, A. J., & Cheney, D. A. (2010). The miner's canary: A review of overrepresentation research and explanations. *Journal of Special Education*, *44*(1), 29–49. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466908329226

Welner, K. G. (2001). *Legal rights, local wrongs: When community control collides with educational equity*. State University of New York Press.

Manuscript received June 4, 2020
Final revision received July 29, 2022
Accepted October 26, 2022