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ABSTRACT

This document is the report of one phase of a Minnesota study to examine the problem of disproportionate representation in special education of African American, American Indian, Latino, and Asian American students. Phase 3 of the study focused on factors which have led to the underrepresentation, rather than overrepresentation of Asian American students in special education. Two focus groups were conducted, one of professionals who serve Asian American populations and the other of parents of Asian American students with disabilities. Focus groups addressed questions concerning what works, what doesn't work, what the contributing factors are, and what needs to be done. Two main themes were found in responses of both groups concerning "what works": first, the importance of involving parents in the special education process and, second, the due process system approach to ensuring input from parents. Themes concerning what doesn't work that contribute to disproportionate representation focused on the complexity and overall effectiveness of the system; referral and assessment practices; differing cultural perceptions; language barriers; and lack of knowledge by parents of due process rights. Concerning what needs to be done, the groups stressed training initiatives for both parents and education staff, a need for parent advocates to facilitate home school communication, and more community outreach efforts. Appended are a summary of key issues from the study's three phases, the action plan of Phase 1 and 2, and an annotated bibliography. Contains 46 references. (DB)

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF

Children, Families & Learning

Final Report

Phase III: Asian American

Disproportionate Representation of Minorities in Special Education: A Focus Group Study of Professional and Parent Perspectives

Minority and Cultural Issues Work Group
Division of Special Education

March, 1998

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1998

Phase III: Focus Group Analysis—Asian American

Division of Special Education

Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning

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Vision

An appropriate public education for each student.

Mission

We promote appropriate representation of students of color in special education through:

a) **clarification of issues**
b) **collaboration with education agencies, organizations, programs, and families**
c) **identifying best practices in non-biased assessment**
d) **dissemination of information**
e) **staff development activities**

Initiatives

Initiatives Completed or In-Progress

- Conducted focus groups with professional groups (Phase I) and parents of students of color with disabilities (Phase II) to study the issue of disproportionate representation.
- Preparation of assessment guidelines for monitors and used in the training for peer monitors.
- Development of draft assessment guidelines and training resources for African American and American Indian students.
- Implemented a process to gather referral data in four pilot school districts that will be incorporated into the statewide data collection system to monitor special education referral trends and patterns.

Ongoing Initiatives

- Preparation and dissemination of translated special education due process materials (e.g., Somali, Hmong, Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, Spanish and Russian).
- Audiotape parent rights information in Hmong, Spanish, and English for parents who have reading difficulties, or who prefer to access information orally.
- Provide ongoing support to programs designed to increase outreach and promote involvement of parents of color.
- Engage in collaborative training activities with the Office of Indian Education and the Office of LEP Education to provide training to Indian and Bilingual home-school liaisons.

Initiatives for 1997-98

- Completion of assessment guidelines for minority students.
- Conduct a focus group study involving the issues of under-representation with professionals and parents in the Asian American community (Phase III).
- Initiate a data collection process to examine potential funding options for African American home-school liaisons.
- Conduct preliminary research and prepare an action plan to assess the language needs of American Indian students and how the special education system should address those needs.
- Establish an on-line data base of bilingual interpreters in cooperation with the Learner Options Division.
- Identify appropriate prereferral interventions to address the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic needs of African American and American Indian students.
- Conduct an analysis of referral data elements which have been added to the statewide data collection system to study referral trends of minority students.

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Phase III: Professional and Parent Groups

Minority and Cultural Issues Work Group

Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning
Division of Special Education

Introduction

In the past several years, the Minority and Cultural Issues Work Group of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning has studied the issue of special education and its role in meeting the needs of minority youth within the state. Much of the focus of this has been on the placement of minority students in special education programs. Like many other states in the nation, Minnesota is being increasingly challenged with the problem of disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs. Based on federal child count data for Minnesota shown in Table 1 on the following page, the disproportionate overrepresentation of African American, American Indian, and Latino students appears to be a growing concern, particularly in the less "visible" disability areas such as learning disabilities, emotional and behavior disorders, and mild mental impairment. Whereas much of the focus of disproportionate placement is on the overrepresentation of minority students, the concern for Asian American students is that they tend to be underrepresented relative to not just the majority, but to other minority groups as well.

Recognizing that disproportionate representation of minority students in special education was likely to be an emerging issue which needed to be addressed in the future, the Minority and Cultural Issues Work Group of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning (CFL) designed a study which involved a series of focus group activities to examine issues relating to the disproportionate placement of minority students. To guide these activities, the Work Group developed a vision which called for "an appropriate public education for each student" and a mission which promoted appropriate representation of students of color in special education by concentrating efforts in the following areas:

- a clarification of the issues
- collaboration with education agencies, organizations, programs, and families
- identifying best practices in non-biased assessment
- dissemination of information
- staff development activities

Table 1: Percent of Minorities Placed in Special Education Programs*

Total Enrollment	Specific Learning Disabilities	Mild/Moderate Mental Impairment	Emotional Behavioral Disorders	All Disabilities
African American	7.38%	1.63%	3.57%	17.46%
American Indian	7.43%	1.40%	5.00%	19.49%
Latino	5.20%	1.14%	1.78%	12.60%
Caucasian	4.49%	.87%	1.99%	12.15%
Asian American	**2.29%**	**.51%**	**.46%**	**6.67%**

* Figures in table reflect percentage of minority group in each categorical area according to December 1, 1996, federal special education child count for Minnesota.

In order to study the issue of disproportionate representation in a systematic manner, a focus group design was implemented in a series of three "phases," each representing some aspect of the problem. Phase I activities commenced in 1996 and involved an analysis of eight focus groups of professional staff serving African American, American Indian, and Latino populations in various educational settings across the state. The purpose of this phase was to obtain information regarding factors contributing to minority overrepresentation in programs and to identify promising solutions. In the formation of these groups, a concerted effort was made to ensure that each group met the following criteria: minority culture representation, dominant culture representation, gender balance, geographic location (e.g., urban, rural, reservation), professional role diversity, and participants who were licensed and assigned to work in a disability area.

In 1997, Phase II activities were initiated to examine the issue of disproportionate representation and overrepresentation from the perspective of parents and family members, both as members of an ethnic or racial group, and as parents or primary caregivers of minority students currently served in special education programs. A primary purpose of this phase was to help clarify and illuminate on previous findings, bringing to light other issues and concerns, therefore contributing toward a more comprehensive understanding of the problem. The results of Phase I and Phase II efforts can be seen in two reports released by the Minority and Cultural Issues Work Group: *Final Report of Phase I: Disproportionate Representation of Minorities in Special Education—Professional Perspectives* (1996, CFL) and *Final Report of Phase II: Disproportionate Representation of Minorities in Special Education—Parent Perspectives* (1997, CFL).

The purpose of the current effort, Phase III, is to examine the issue of disproportionate representation from an Asian American perspective. Unlike previous phases, where the results of professional and parent groups were reported separately since each involved multiple minority groups (i.e., African American, American Indian, and Latino), the design of the present study will combine the viewpoints of both professionals and parents. A key aspect of this phase is to identify factors which have led to the underrepresentation, rather than overrepresentation of Asian American students in special education. Another purpose is to identify

strategies which can help meet the present and future needs of Asian American families whose children are referred, assessed, and placed in special education programs. Finally, research obtained by those who have studied this issue will be used to supplement focus group results.

Literature Review

Asian American Diversity

Similar to what happens when one attempts to ascribe a common set of cultural characteristics among Native Americans, overlooking the wide amount of diversity is also something that occurs with some degree of regularity with Asian American populations. As a result of a long-standing tendency to only focus on shared attributes of Asian culture, many are unaware that Asian Americans are comprised of "vastly diverse ethnic, religious, and language groups" (Chang, 1994). Just to provide a perspective of the diversity from a geographic standpoint, the 1990 U.S. Bureau of the Census data has shown that Asian Americans represent a fairly significant portion of the globe, with Chinese Americans forming the largest group, followed by Filipino Americans, Japanese Americans, Asian Indian Americans, Korean Americans, Vietnamese Americans, Lao Americans, Cambodian Americans, Thai Americans, and Hmong Americans. In addition to representing diverse language and cultural characteristics, it is important to note that significant variability can also exist within each group as well. For example, those who have immigrated from Laos alone can represent more than fifty ethnic groups who speak different languages. Similarly, Chinese Americans can represent more than eighty different ethnic groups and a wide variety of languages. As one of the fastest growing minority groups of the U.S. population, the number of Asian Americans has grown 108% in the period from 1980 to 1990, and substantial growth in this decade is projected as well (Sanchez, 1995).

Asian American Commonalties

Still, even with this range of variation, a large degree of commonality exists among Asian Americans as well. Leung (1987; 1988) points out that many, in fact, share a common outlook with regard to values, beliefs, traditions, and customs as a result of such influential religious and philosophical perspectives such as Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Buddhism, and Animism. For example, Cheng (1989) points out that Confucianism, which dictates many aspects between the relationship of family members, reaches far beyond its origins in China, having a profound impact in the development of family systems in many parts of Asia, including Vietnam, Japan, and Korea. In an examination of commonalties shared by Asian Americans, Leung (1988) suggests that the most significant of these involve family, ethics, education, responsibility, industry, endurance, restraint, moderation, modesty, and loyalty. Also, included, however, are what Leung considers to be "less lofty" characteristics—such as "shrewdness, materialism, superstition and ignorance which may be unavoidable in the humanity constrained by limited resources and education."

Myth of the "Model Minority"

In addition to considering the diversities and commonalties in terms of social and familial characteristics, is the manner in which Asian Americans have immigrated to the United States. While many Asian Americans have gained their citizenship status through traditional means, such as applying for a visa and undergoing a screening process, the experience for a significant number of them is one of having been a refugee who never initially intended on leaving the homeland, but was compelled to do so in order to escape political persecution, war, and social upheaval. As indicated by Cheng (1989), for many Asian American families currently living in the U.S., this meant living in refugee camps for an extended duration, enduring a transition period which was often "filled with unrest, separation anxiety, and fear." To reflect the variety of circumstances which Asian Americans have immigrated to the U.S., Cheng identified four principal types of groups based on their prior status and education:

- First generation immigrants and refugees who came to the U.S. as young adults.
- The "one and a half" generation who were born in Southeast Asia and who are now being educated, or have been educated in the U.S.
- The second generation who were born and educated in the U.S.
- The third generation whose parents were born and educated in the U.S.

The manner in which immigration has occurred for Asian Americans has important implications on how perceptions have been formed by the public as related to the educational needs of Asian American youth. For example, one can find many examples of "success stories" of Japanese Americans who have overcome many hardships in the past to eventually achieve a high degree of success within the educational system. Similar stories can be found about other Asian groups who have immigrated to the U.S. and have managed to successfully acclimate to mainstream economic and educational institutions within society. To a large extent, this has been the experience for many Asian Americans who represent the third and fourth categories indicated above; that is, those whose family histories in this country that can extend back as far as two centuries (Pang, 1995). As a result of these successes, a folklore has evolved over the years which have led many to believe that Asian Americans constitute a "model minority." However, a number of researchers (Tsang, 1992; Lee, 1996; Pang, 1995) have suggested that the perception of a "model minority" is actually a myth which not only fails to depict what is really occurring for many Asian Americans, but also may function as a way of marginalizing important social, political, and educational problems which need to be addressed within society.

Evidence to dispute the model minority myth has come from several studies, including an early one conducted by the Chancellor's Task Force for the New York City Board of Education in 1989. This study found that a number of problems existed in the education of Asian American students and recommended that changes were needed in such areas as curriculum development, efforts to increase parent involvement activities, and in the area of

professional development of staff. One of the key points of the study was expressed in the project summary:

> The rosy picture that Asian American youth are academic successes by almost any gauge does not in fact hold true for many Asian American students. These students, who make up 7.3 percent of the population of the public schools, are dropping out at a disturbing rate, and those who remain in school face an array of problems such as harassment from their peers, classes that are inappropriate for their achievement levels, language and cultural conflicts, and educators who ignore their problems because they expect Asian children to be perfect.

While acknowledging that many Asian Americans have managed to acclimate quite well to Western culture, Leung (1987) states that there are still many who remain on "marginal status, hovering around poverty, uncertainty and impotence—unable to cope with problems and anxiety related to migration and acculturation." Some of those who are most impacted by the model minority myth are Asian American students whose families represent the first and second immigrant group, many whom were former refugees and victims of war-related social upheaval. When all immigrant categories are taken as a whole, recent findings show that Asian Americans can vary rather significantly with regard to education attainment levels. However, despite these differences Chang (1994) suggests that many in the field of education continue to hold onto beliefs that tend to stereotype Asian Americans as minorities who tend to succeed in school and demonstrate fewer needs for support and special education services. The findings of Kim (1983) also suggest that in addition to stereotyped expectations of achievement, other factors which contribute to the delivery of special education services to Asian American students of the "referral-inhibiting" characteristics of the children themselves—most notably passivity and conformity—and educational policies which result in discouraging the referral of Asian American students for special education services.

Family Education and Communication

In addition to expectations of academic success held for Asian American students, another factor which must be considered are cultural characteristics and perceptions of parents, especially their views on disabilities which have been shaped by their culture and their level of awareness and understanding of special education services. Research by Matsuda (1989) and others have shown that of the concept of "disability" can vary greatly within Asian culture, ranging from a perception of a child with a disability as a "divine gift" to an "ancestral curse." Also, the nature of the disability may be seen entirely differently, depending on the beliefs with which one was raised. In some Asian countries, for example, there is no analog for what would be referred to as a learning disability or a speech and language disorder (Chang, 1994). Matsuda (1989) asserts that some Asian American parents "often find it difficult to accept speech and language disorders that are not the result of physical abnormalities, particularly if the child's behavior is neither disruptive nor bizarre." Also, according to Cheng (1989), "some Southeast Asian groups, like the Hmong, did not have a written language until the 1950s," even though they had a rich oral history. In some cases, parents are likely to blame

themselves because they believe the disability could have been prevented if they had only given their child the proper care.

In order to address issues of this nature, researchers (Su, 1993, Shwartz, 1995; Matsuda, 1989) stress the importance of establishing culturally competent communication strategies which can serve the dual purpose of informing and educating Asian American parents about disabilities and special education services. Cheng (1996) suggests that this objective requires more than proficiency in language translation since effective communication also requires skills that extend beyond semantics, phonology, and pragmatics, suggesting that one must become both bilingual and biculturally competent as well. One way in which effective communication with families can be facilitated is through the development of a liaison program in which trained individuals familiar with the language and culture provide services to families, helping them to understand the special education system and encouraging family participation in this process. Halford (1996) has indicated that such services can provide a "vital link" between the home, school, and community. To help with establishing effective cross-cultural communication which helps to promote parental empowerment and involvement in their child's educational program, Tran (1992) has urged that the involvement of the Asian American community itself in the planning and implementation of such efforts is critical to achieving success. Suggesting that maintaining communication linkages at all levels has strong implications for those in special education, Chang (1994) concluded that those in related special education fields could provide effective services by "forming an alliance for collaboration across school, home, and community to generate social capital that is essential for all students."

For those not aware of the history and culture of those who have immigrated to the U.S. from Asian countries, the number of students served in special education programs may at first appear to be an indicator of fewer disabilities. However, research in this area is replete with examples of why these percentages may be suppressed as a result of misperceptions and a general lack of awareness of cultural dynamics which have resulted in disproportionate representation. The intent of this literature review was to present some of the main points which have been made by researchers who have studied this issue, even though it is certainly not inclusive of the range of issues that could be addressed. For example, much could still be written about limited English proficient Asian American students with disabilities (Chang, 1993: Chan, 1983), assessment (Dao, 1991; Koh, 1982), and instructional strategies for Asian American students with disabilities or considered at risk (Kamp & Chinn, 1982; Morrow & McBride, 1988). Finally, one must not overlook issues involving racism and discrimination of Asian Americans (Hong & Hong, 1995).

Procedure

To conduct Phase III activities, a member of the Minority and Cultural Issues Work Group conducted two focus groups representing (1) professionals who serve Asian American populations, and (2) parents of Asian American students with disabilities. To recruit participants for the focus groups, communication was initiated with Asian American interpreters, liasions, and coordinators around the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitian area to use their contacts to recruit professionals and parents for the focus group activities. While participation was sought from a wide range as possible of the various Asian American groups living in the region, it was anticipated that most potential group members represent the Hmong population, the largest group of Asian Americans in the metropolitan area. As an incentive to participate in the focus group sessions, a stipend was offered as compensation for their efforts. Altogether, eight individuals participated in the Asian American focus group session for professionals, including those who arrived late or were unable to remain for the entire session. Parent focus groups consisted of eleven parents who participated in two separate sessions. All of the individuals participating in the parent groups had a child with an identified disability who was receiving special education services within the metropolitan area. As anticipated, the majority of participants were of Hmong ethnicity and resided in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

Using the general procedures established in previous phases of this effort, once participants were recruited and assembled in their respective group a separate focus group activity was held at a different time and place for each professional and parent group. Prior to formally beginning each session, participants were presented with an introductory statement by the facilitator, followed by a presentation of the MNCRIS statistical summaries compiled to report on the status of minority populations within the realm of the special education system. Upon reviewing this information, focus group participants were asked to reflect on four primary questions about the subject of disproportionate representation within special education. In brief, focus groups were asked to respond to the following questions:

1) *What works?*
2) *What does not work?*
3) *What are contributing factors?*
4) *What needs to be done?*

Essentially, the first two questions dealt with issues directly related to the MNCRIS data shown to the group while the latter two questions were intended to address issues related to the findings of studies conducted over the past several years by the Division of Special Education. In summary, the findings of these studies concluded that: (1) a relationship exists between race and special education placement, and (2) race appears to be a factor which influences referral, identification, and placement practices in special education.

During each focus group session the participant responses were recorded by audio tape, supplemented by field notes prepared by the facilitator. Because those who participated in the Asian American professional focus group could speak English, it was not necessary to make language accommodations in order to interpret their responses. However, an interpreter was

used with the parent focus group, where comments of the participants were translated immediately following a response. Similarly, the interpreter translated the comments and questions of the facilitator to the parent participants.

Consistent with the approach used in previous phases, participant responses were reviewed to identify common issues or concerns in which there appeared to be some degree of similarity in content. These issues were then grouped and assigned a general descriptor (e.g., assessment practices) to facilitate the process of identifying key issues or "themes." The primary objective of this activity was to synthesize and narrow the scope of the many types of statements made by focus group members. Similar to the process used in Phases I and II, once descriptors of key issues were developed, they were placed on a list and arranged by group affiliation and by question. A summary of key issues derived from Phases I and II can be seen in Appendix A. This summary includes an overview of key areas, concerns, and issues based on the responses of various focus groups to each of the four primary questions.

The grid depicted in Table 2 on the following page is intended to provide a general overview of key issues identified by professional and parent Asian American focus groups. It also serves as a starting point in helping to ascertain what, if any, unique themes can be observed in a separate analysis of the groups or if commonalties could be identified in a combined analysis of professional and parent groups. It should be noted that the term "unique" is used somewhat advisedly since thematic content is not considered mutually exclusive; that is, themes are bound to overlap among groups, and it is likely that no one theme will be associated with just one group.

Once all of the relevant key issues were identified, another iteration of the focus group analysis was conducted by an extensive tape-based analysis similar to the process described by Krueger (1994). First, all tapes were listened to and an abridged transcription of the focus group content was entered on a computer. The only exception to this process was in the case of data obtained from the parent focus group, where data was analyzed through the interpretation of an Asian American translator who was present at the parent session. Second, these data were analyzed question by question to determine how well the themes which emerged from this level of analysis correlated with the initial, or preliminary findings. Using information from the tape-based analysis, it was then possible to extract specific comments from focus group members which supported certain thematic areas. Because a language interpreter was used for each parent group, all of the comments made by parents in the report reflect the interpreter's translation. Although interpreters occasionally provided a literal translation of statements made by parents, in most cases, they tended to either paraphrase or summarize parent responses. Also, whenever necessary, comments of some focus group members were edited to conform with common grammatical rules. In these cases, every attempt was made to accurately convey the intent of the speaker. Once compiled, the comments of the participants were used to develop a "database" to provide important contextual information about complex and multifaceted issues (e.g., "effective communication with families"). Finally, these data were also used as a means of synthesizing information in order to identify major areas of "need" and the framework for a future plan of action.

Table 2: Key Issues of Asian American Focus Groups
Parent and Professional Groups (Phase III)

What Works?	What Doesn't Work?	What are Contributing Factors?	What Needs to be Done?
■ Parent involvement and communication ■ Individual Educational Plans (IEP); goals and objectives ■ Culturally competent services	■ Referral and assessment practices ■ Complexity of the special education service systems ■ Communication of IEP goals and objectives to parents ■ Home-school communication	■ Lack of cultural awareness on behalf of parents and educators ■ Lack of awareness about educational systems and processes among Asian Americans ■ Inappropriate referral and assessment practices ■ Language barriers	■ Training for bilingual staff in special education ■ Community outreach to promote awareness of disabilities ■ Training for parents in cultural awareness and disability issues ■ Increased parent involvement and communication ■ Data collection efforts to monitor minority placement in special education

Focus Group Summary

What Works in Special Education?

Two main themes were found in the responses of professional and parent focus group members to the question of "What Works?" The overarching issue common to both, however, was that of involving parents in the special education process. On one hand, the subject of parent involvement was discussed broadly, not limited to those efforts which are usually taken by special education staff to request parent attendance at IEP meetings and solicit their input in the child study process. Rather, in this context, "involvement" could have been synonymous with information sharing and awareness building activities, based on the rationale that early efforts to involve Asian American parents can lead to establishing effective communication between the school and home setting. That is, focus group members suggested that involving parents at the early stages was essential to establishing long-range trust and cooperation. Several focus group members asserted that one of the primary reasons for promoting early family involvement was to help address issues related to how disabilities were viewed from a cultural perspective and to increase parents' understanding of the role of special education services. Focus group member comments included:

> *"What worked was that they (special educators) get parents involved initially...getting parent involvement in the beginning and throughout the whole process (is important)...asking for their opinion whether or not the program will work for the family or for the kids. I think that works well in the process."*

"It goes along real well when the parents get to know the teacher. At first, it is not very comfortable for the parent to talk with the teacher because of the culture thing...the Lao say our Hmong people are very shy...but if that child stays in the program for a number of years, the parents seem to bond to the teacher and listens to what the teacher says about what works for the child...I feel that it has worked for many Hmong families (whose children are served by) special education."

"What works well is that the parents are asked for input regarding the child's condition or situation and they allow parents to participate in the decision-making process. I think that it is very important for parents and I think that's why it's working."

"Clear communication between the professional and the parent (works). Setting a clear goal and knowing what resources are needed...so they have a clear communication on who's doing what...I think that is what is working well for the children."

Interpreter: *"This mom says that special education is something to help the child be able to learn in her or his world...to be able to use their ability to do things. Her child has had a severe handicap and special education has served this little girl ever since she was a couple of months old. Now she can talk and learn English. She feels that the school has done a wonderful job to help her through the year. This mom feels that the school has been helpful, that they have helped her in many many ways. Education is very important to her children."*

On the other hand, in addition to early involvement efforts, another aspect of special education which a focus group member indicated "worked" was the due process system and the opportunity it gave parents to participate in their child's educational program. This seemed to be particularly important from the standpoint that the basic design of the due process was to include input from parents, an approach which parent opinion is sought out and included in the child's special education program. As one focus group member indicated, the due process system "is respectful to parents because it asks for their permission to start the process." Other comments included:

"I feel that it's the process...due process and (the right) to agree or disagree with any proposed plan...I am from a cultural background that has respect for others."

"In my experience, I think what works well with the process is when school informs parents of the process of what is going on, what they have observed, and what they need to help kid so parents are aware."

"The special education team...because it's a small group and parents have an opportunity to join with the team in helping to make decisions about what services the children will receive...that is good for both parents and staff."

In addition to observations which involved the procedures used in the special education process, one parent indicated how helpful assistive technology had been in addressing the special education needs of his child. Suggesting that such devices have helped his child to be included in the regular education classroom, the parent said (via the interpreter) that the child is "Using the computer to communicate with others and that's very good—the computer is made right on the wheelchair, so it goes with him—he is with other children in the classroom and he likes school very much."

Much like the focus groups involved in Phases I and II of this study, early involvement of parents constituted an important aspect of special education services. Along with this was the notion that to involve parents and secure their support, one needed to communicate effectively and demonstrate respect for the integrity of Asian American family systems. As indicated by focus group members, the due process system is seen as something that "works" because it is a means of showing respect for families and involving them in the decision-making process.

What Doesn't Work in Special Education?

In their discussions about aspects of special education which did not seem to work for Asian American students and their families, three primary themes emerged. The first was related to the complexity and overall effectiveness of the system, particularly for parents whose own life experiences and opportunities to obtain an education were vastly different than that of their children. The second theme, one identified by those involved in the professional focus group involved concerns about referral and assessment practices of Asian American students. The theme that seemed to underscore discussions of complexity issues and referral and assessment practices, however, were the wide range of problems encountered as a result of differing cultural perceptions and language barriers.

In the case of system complexity, one focus group member expressed a concern about what was seen as delays in the system and the length of time taken by child study teams to process a student who had been referred. Other focus group members talked about the difficulties associated with attempting to describe a system to parents that contains many legal intricacies and which is often difficult even for those who have been fully acculturated to understand. In addition to the complexity of the system, focus group members also commented that the team approach used to address the needs of children was a phenomenon that many Asian American families were unfamiliar with and which could even sometimes be an initial source of confusion and apprehension for the parents. One professional focus group member suggested that one factor which contributes to this problem is when special educators neglect to take the time to explain the nature of the child's disability and the parents role within the special education process.

As indicated by several parent focus group members, one of the consequences of not being familiar with the education system is simply not knowing when or how to make a referral when a learning problem is suspected. As indicated by a focus group member through the interpreter, "Parents don't know the school system—American parents know right way what the child is capable of and what they can and cannot do." According to this parent, this is especially the case with milder forms of disabilities and accounts for why most of the identified population of Asian American children are those with more visible and severe types of disabilities. This view appears to be supported by others who participated in the parent focus groups as well. A sample of focus group member responses included:

"The time a child is referred by the teacher to the assessment team...it really delays the help and causes the child to fall further behind. It's the time of the referral to the assessment to the IEP—it takes too long."

"Special education is very hard to explain to parents because it has so much to do with the child's needs and has so many people involved at the same time. I feel it is very complicated for families and (sometimes) may be too overwhelming with too many staff."

"What I see that does not work is that special education staff do not take the time to educate parents about disabilities—they bypass the explanation that will bring parents along. Make sure that parents really understand the process, their child's abilities and what is involved, and how they (parents) can be involved at both school and at home. They (special education staff) meet with parents twice a year and the parents don't know what is going on."

Interpreter: *"We Hmong parents came to this country and it's a new country and a new system. We don't know the system and when my child's teacher told me my child was having problems at school, I didn't know what to do. I saw Dao (a PACER staff member) on TV, called him up to ask what I could do for my child. We don't know how to refer the child when he or she is not learning."*

Interpreter: *"For a lot of parents who came here tonight, it is obvious they have children who are very needy, but I believe that a lot of times there are children who have different levels of disabilities and sometimes it is hard for parents to know—sometimes parents don't ask the school to evaluate—that could be part of the problem.*

Referral and assessment issues were also discussed among focus group members, mostly those involved in the professional group. Their comments about the referral process included observations about problems which are sometimes encountered when parents refer their child for services and when special education services become the de facto means for providing remedial instruction when no other support alternatives are available. Their observations about the assessment process were found to reflect the dilemma faced by many education professionals responsible for the collection of assessment information which is culturally sensitive, but which still remains reliable and useful for instructional planning. Specifically, focus group members discussed the influence of Western culture not only in terms of how assessment is conducted, but with regard to the way disabilities are viewed as well. Along with problems associated with the assessment in general, focus group members also suggested that more parent involvement was needed in the assessment process and one specifically commented on the lack of Asian American professionals working within school systems who could serve as both role models and liaisons in the referral and assessment process. Comments offered by focus group professionals included:

"I think the problem is the referral process and deciding how the student is going to be referred. I think that it does not work well. We need to look if we have the service or the additional service to help a child; when we don't, we just refer them to special education."

"When some parents referred their child to special education to have a program, I felt that the school did not respond well. The reason they gave to parents was that the child was not in the educational setting for a period of time, so there is no data available (to show) that the child could not make progress without special help. I think the parents struggled with that—they know their child real well that their child will not make it."

"The assessment...sometimes I feel that professionals do not actually count the parents as equals—the school does not have a culturally competent assessment process."

"Southeast Asian parents see disability in a different way than other groups, especially the disabilities that are not visible, like LD. The family feels that as long the child's physical and social development is growing, that's fine. Some of the problem is with assessment too."

"Some of the tests are quite European, middle-class, and not focused on the perspective and strengths of the specific culture. I see a lack of Hmong professionals in special ed. I am not seeing Hmong therapists, social workers or special education teachers."

To many who participated in the focus groups, misunderstandings and misperceptions in the referral and assessment process were often a manifestation of the lack of cultural awareness and language barriers which occurred between educators and parents. For some focus group members this relationship was reciprocal, suggesting that both educators and parents tend to contribute to this problem, with educators often lacking useful knowledge about Asian American culture and its implications within the educational system, and parents who are unaware of the expectations of educating youth in contemporary American school systems. Based on the observations of some focus group members, this mutual lack of awareness and understanding inhibits communication between home and school and suggests that more teacher training and parent involvement efforts are needed to help overcome some of the misperceptions. Clearly, the most significant factor in discussions of this nature involved language barriers which exist and implications regarding the extent to which language facilitates awareness and adaptation to a culture. Focus group member comments included:

"The reason why I feel it doesn't work for the Hmong family is because some of the parents do not speak the language, so it's really difficult and hard to explain why your child has special needs, or needs therapy, speech, or sign language."

"With (regard to) special education that doesn't work for the Hmong child—more parents are upset about having their child on medication; they (parents) think that special education should try some other alternative. A Hmong parent's perception, it is that it takes time to outgrow. One problem why it (special education) doesn't work are the cultural barriers on both sides."

"It is a complicated process, especially for the family because of their educational background, language barriers, and cultural barriers, it is too difficult and overwhelming to internalize what is happening at school."

"I would just like to add that there's a lack of sensitivity from both professionals and parents in terms of culture, language, and education. (Professional staff in) schools

need to be trained to understand the parent's culture, values and perceptions of disabilities. Both parents and professionals need to be educated on that issue, and until they are aware of the necessity of those needs or problems, we are not going to get any better in providing services to children."

Interpreter: *"We, as parents, find the (English) language hard and when our children bring homework, we cannot help our children—language communication is part of it."*

Interpreter: *"The language dilemma at school—we don't have enough Hmong teachers. When they don't have Hmong teachers to communicate with the parents, it is hard for the parents to know whether the child can do good at school. Also, parents don't know how to seek help."*

Based on discussions which largely occurred in parent focus groups, a key outcome which has occurred as a result of difficulties related to home-school communication and other problems encountered by parents in attempting to navigate their way through the special education system were expressions which indicated a lack of trust and skepticism of that system. For example, one parent expressed distress over an incident which happened to his daughter with physical disabilities who apparently had an accident in the classroom. According to what he said to the interpreter, his daughter fell, breaking one of her arms that she uses for mobility around the house. Other than being informed by the Hmong interpreter when the accident had occurred, the parent indicated that he was never contacted by the teacher who was present when the accident occurred, nor had he heard from a school administrator. Expressing disappointment with how this incident was handled by the school, the parent related to the interpreter "I am really sad and I am very concerned. I don't have faith, I don't trust the school." Other parents voiced concerns about the effectiveness of special education and whether services were addressing the needs of their children. The interpreter related several other instances of concern expressed by parent focus group members:

Interpreter: "As *a parent, I would like to have a school program that will help my child. My child right now is almost 14 and the IEP doesn't say anything about finding a job, or my child's future. I would like to have that on the IEP—that would be very helpful for my child."*

Interpreter: *"My child has a problem with speech. When she speaks, it's hard for us to understand, even for Hmong, and I know she's worse in speaking English, but I don't know why the teacher has not invited me for an (IEP) meeting. It's been a year now. School's almost over, but I haven't been to any meetings about my child."*

Interpreter: *"I would like the school to help my child with more functional skills...I think it's more important for my child's future to teach her functional skills, chores in the home, and personal hygiene. I do not want the school to say my child cannot find a job because she is in a wheelchair."*

Evident in the various issues and concerns raised by parents is the lack of effective communication which presently exists between home and the school. Coupled with this problem appears to be some degree of uncertainty on behalf of some educators in their ability to address the special needs of Asian American children. For example, one parent related that it was very difficult for him to obtain a clear idea about his child's relative strengths and weaknesses.

Suggesting it was just as important to know aspects of his child's development in which more progress was needed in addition to the progress which has already been made, the parent indicated to the interpreter that "I don't have any ideas to add at the (IEP meeting) with teachers, because what I hear is that everything is good. I want to see what they have done with my child that is helpful and what my child can do and cannot do. Don't just say my child is good at everything—that doesn't help."

What Factors Contribute to Disproportionate Representation?

A portion of the discussion among Asian American focus group members involved how well the current design of special education services addressed not only the needs of Asian American students, but minority students in general. Specifically, several of the members discussed the categorical area of emotional and behavioral disorders, speculating that inappropriate assessment and placement practices were contributing factors which led to system dysfunction. Once again, cultural perceptions seemed to be an important factor shaping one's ideas and opinions about the role of special education and how it should serve youth. When discussing children with behavioral problems, one focus group member indicated that "a child who just has a problem with behavior, they end up in special education...I think it's too many." In addition, another member commented, "Don't you feel that special education should only serve special needs? Not behavior." One participant concluded, "Those children (with behavior problems)—they don't need to be in special education, but some parents are just not capable to take care of them—they just need somebody to watch over them."

Similar to what was discussed in the question about things that didn't "work" in special education, focus group members suggested that language barriers were also a factor that contributed to the problem of disproportionate placement of minority students. At one point in the professional focus group session, one participant indicated that there was a lack of trained interpreters and liaisons who were available to establish and maintain contacts with parents and to facilitate communication between the home and school settings. Focus group members comments included:

> *"Many times I think that the parents who have children in special education have limited English proficiency. The majority of parents who have limited English would tend to have children in special ed, because they cannot speak for themselves, they go along where the school referred them."*
>
> *"In screening children for kindergarten, some are just too young. The parents know the child does not need special education services, but (the child) taking that test did not pass because of the language barrier."*
>
> *"I think maybe a doctor or nurse might think a child has special needs, but the parent does not. The parents might think that the child is just too young. In some cultures, some children are a little bit later in learning to speak, and sometimes just end up in special education for no reason. There is a lack of communication and language."*

Another issue mentioned by a professional focus group member which contributed to the disproportionate representation of minorities in general was the general theme of cultural awareness and sensitivity, including issues of racism and discrimination. After examining the

MNCRIS table of data which showed the percentages of minority students in Minnesota special education programs, this participant said "We have 7% who receive special education according to this information, this is disproportionate—this is something that I personally don't know what is really going on." As noted in a previous question, the topic of culturally sensitive assessment practices was found to be included in several comments, suggesting that improvements were needed in order to help professionals determine whether a learning problem actually might be present, or if the child's concerns can be better understood through an increased awareness of the cultural factors of Asian Americans which may impact the learning process. In their discussion of cultural and assessment issues which contributed to disproportionate representation in special education, focus group members observed:

> *"I'm not sure if this would answer the question, but the way I look at this (MNCRIS) chart, I can visualize that most of the students in special education are minority and that translates into discrimination—racism from our point of view. From the Caucasian point of view, it could be a hostile feeling toward parents or their culture that may translate into why many Caucasian teachers do not want to have any minority or special ed students."*
>
> *"The cultural background...the misunderstanding of how parents believe (and in their) traditions...I think the other thing are the assessment tools and passing children who need to improve."*
>
> *"People who are doing the evaluating they need help...they need to get their information correct. Unless you are part of that culture, it's very hard to evaluate anything. And that's the problem we have all through education...the people we have doing the evaluating and the testing are not representative."*
>
> *"The lack of culture sensitivity. Because the student doesn't pick up the language fast enough and doesn't meet expectations of the peers and school, (the student) gets referred. I think that assessments need to change in a way that will be more sensitive. We Hmong people perceive special education differently from European Americans. Special education staff need to be educated and learn to understand Hmong or whatever culture they are working with and be sensitive in providing special education services."*

Those who participated in parent focus groups emphasized a lack of awareness and knowledge of the special education system and due process rights afforded to parents. Affirming the experiences of most first generation Asian American parents who participated in the focus group sessions, one parent said "We Hmong parents came to this country and it's a new country, also, it's a new system and we don't know the system...my child was having problems at school and I didn't know what to do." Stating that language barriers contributed to the problem, another focus group member added "The (English) language is hard and when our children bring homework home, we cannot help them." Although several parents indicated that PACER had helped them to become more aware of the special education system and their due process rights, it was clear that its existence was not well known within the Asian American community. As one parent said, "A lot of times when parents seek help and ask questions, they don't even know about PACER, you know? PACER is a big organization, but a lot of parents don't know about it." Another parent indicated that she found out about PACER coincidentally while watching the local news program. She stated "In 1992

I saw Dao (Dao Xiong, a PACER staff person) on TV. I called him up and asked 'What can I do about my child?' Dao helped with the educational process and that's been very helpful."

What Needs to be Done?

The recommendations of participants involved in the professional focus group centered on the implementation of training initiatives designed for both parents and education staff. In the case of parents, the objective of training would be to help them become more knowledgeable about special education services within the school and community, including the general nature of disabilities within modern American society. Included within this training initiative would be the dissemination of information about the role of the parent as a collaborative member of the child study team, confidentiality and privacy issues, and advocacy strategies for Asian American families. Consistent with many of their responses to other questions posed to focus group members, a recommendation was made to increase efforts aimed at increasing cultural awareness of both parents and education staff since focus group members indicated that a greater knowledge and understanding of American society would also help parents better understand the educational system, and more specifically, their role in the education of a child with a disability. To facilitate this process, focus group members indicated that a need existed for parent advocates and others who could establish and maintain effective communication between the school and the home. Along with these recommendations, focus group members also indicated a need to:

- Train bilingual staff in special education rules and laws to help parents understand important aspects of the due process and their role within that process.
- Create more outreach efforts within the community as a means of increasing awareness about areas of special education and disabilities and in helping to forge strong educational-community partnerships.
- Implement initiatives which promote greater parent involvement in the schools to strengthen home and school communication and establishing "a real partnership in education."
- Support activities which will allow for the collection of data to study the issue of minority placement in special education programs and to monitor the progress of those who are receiving special education services.

In one of the focus group sessions held with parents, participants discussed the lack of resources available to help Asian American parents establish more effective communication linkages between home and school. A communication problem which results from language barriers is a factor which impacts the ability of parents to fully understand rights and responsibilities within the educational system. As one parent indicated, "I think the biggest problem is we don't know how to make a referral when the child is not learning."

In another session held with parents, participants stressed how important it was for systems and agencies to provide services which could help support parents within the home when children have significant care needs. Specifically, they indicated that the services of a Per-

sonal Care Attendant (PCA) could make a large impact in helping parents to meet the needs of their child in the home setting. One parent indicated that such help was critical for her family because it meant that she would have the opportunity to learn English and obtain additional employment to help the family. In addition, parents also indicated a need existed to help non-English speaking families communicate with education and medical professionals. One parent also mentioned how difficult it was to find day care service that would care for her child. Based on what was indicated by the interpreter, parent comments included:

> Interpreter: *"This mom is saying that because they have a special child in the family, so much help is needed. Maybe more hours for the PCA to help parents...she was going to take an ESL class, but she can't because she has to stay at home with her child—she has to limit her time."*
>
> Interpreter: *"They (parents) don't know how to deal with the system because they don't know the language...(it's) the lack of communication, they say they feel that more services are needed to help with communication."*
>
> Interpreter: *"She (parent) said if you take a special education child to a day care, they (day care providers) don't want to (care for child) because her child takes more time and they have to pay someone to watch only her (child), so they don't want to accept the child for the day care."*
>
> Interpreter: *"She's so happy because she never thought there would be someone out there who cared for her child besides herself. She came from Laos five years ago, she didn't know anything about special education—if she didn't live in this country she might have not been able to keep her daughter, she might have lost her, so she feels the school has done a wonderful job. She's so happy they've been able to help her."*

Consistent throughout the focus group session with parents, most of their comments concentrated on the challenges faced on a day to day basis in terms of attending to the needs of their children with disabilities and meeting the demands of family life. Because both were parents of children with rather significant needs, their perspective may have been somewhat different than other parents whose children had less severe disabilities. In general, the parents who participated in the focus group session tended to emphasize how much special education services had helped their children in school and also how it had helped them to provide care in the home setting.

Combined Groups Summary

Even though the nature of disproportionate representation is generally found to be different from that of other minority groups, when the problem is one of underrepresentation rather than overrepresentation, many of the same themes were seen in the focus group results of Asian Americans. In identifying things that "worked" in special education, Asian Americans stressed the importance of involving parents and establishing effective mechanisms of home and school communication. These general themes also emerged as important based on the discussions of African American, American Indian, and Latino focus groups as part of Phase

I and Phase II activities. In addition, Asian American focus groups were highly supportive of the conceptual model from which the special education due process system evolved, indicating that when implemented as intended, it was respectful to families and helped to make them collaborators in the planning process. Whether seen as something which respected family systems or simply as a means of protecting the rights of children and their families, the due process system utilized in special education was also a theme that seemed to strongly resonate with other minority focus groups as well.

In terms of things that did not "work" in special education, there seemed to be a consensus among all types of minority groups that assessment and placement practices were areas in which changes needed to occur. Reflecting the opinions of others, one Asian American focus group member indicated that it was very difficult to conduct an assessment with a Hmong student without a knowledge of Hmong culture. Like other minority focus groups, Asian American participants indicated that they valued the general conceptual approach involved in the referral and assessment process used in special education, but that each component needed to reflect cultural competence and sensitivity. As such, neither the notion of "referral" or "assessment" was seen as something necessarily negative or inappropriate. Rather, it was the manner in which these concepts were applied to diverse student populations and their families. Parents in particular were more inclined to emphasize problems related to the lack of information about special education services that is being disseminated within the Asian American community rather than problems with the how the system itself is structured. According to one parent focus group participant, some aspects of underrepresentation may simply be a function of how effective information and information efforts have reached families with concerns about their child's learning. Suggesting that such knowledge is often limited among Asian American families, the parents indicated "I have like 300 something families in my clan and I only know 2 or 3 families who have a child that is receiving special education." This observation prompted another to observe that when Asian American children are identified for services, they are often the ones identified with the most obvious need. Suggesting that children with milder forms of disabilities were being overlooked, this parent indicated that "I believe that a lot of times, there are children who have different levels of disabilities, but sometimes it's hard for parents to know."

Emphasizing culturally sensitive communication between the school and the home setting was an issue that received strong support in the discussions of Asian American and other minority focus groups alike. In the case of Asian Americans, maintaining the family integrity and respect is something that is seen as very important, as well as the need for one to be familiar with the values and customs which have been instilled in families over many generations. For example, one professional focus group member recalled a staffing where an educator questioned Asian American parents about their child's sexual development, an incident which caused the family much embarrassment and humiliation. This focus group member indicated that such incidences can be avoided through an increased awareness of cultural values and mores and by providing special educators with alternative strategies which can be used to obtain sensitive information deemed essential to the development of a student's educational program. Similarly, focus group members stressed how critical it was for Asian

American parents to develop skills to help them gain a greater awareness of Western culture, particularly a knowledge of the educational system. With this increased perspective, parents could use this knowledge to help them become stronger advocates and claim a larger role in the planning process. Several of those who participated in the parent focus groups expressed some degree of skepticism regarding how well special education services were meeting the needs of their children. In some cases, parents were uncertain about how improvement was being assessed, while others emphasized difficulties in areas involving the identification and documentation of IEP objectives which met their child's educational needs.

Clearly, many of those who participated in the various focus groups contend that a lack of cultural awareness is a key factor which contributes to disproportionate representation of minorities in special education. For Asian Americans as well as other minority groups, this is also linked to the types of problems associated with referral and assessment practices and most certainly, impacts the degree to which parents are allowed to participate in their child's educational program. As might be expected, language barriers were of particular concern with Asian American and Latino groups, with both groups suggesting that language differences not only impaired home and school communication, but was also a leading factor which served to elevate misperception and lack of trust among parents. As a result, focus group members of both groups advocated for the increased availability of bilingual staff who could help schools establish more effective communication with non-English speaking parents. Members of the Asian American focus group expressed the importance of not just having an interpreter available to provide translation services between educators and parents, but to have someone who was well versed in the areas of due process and disabilities and who could provide a broader range of technical assistance to families.

With regard to the question of what needs to be done in the future to address disproportionate representation, there was a consensus among all minority focus groups that a need existed to increase cultural awareness and diversity training efforts in the future. While other minority focus groups tended to stress the need to increase professional development efforts to address this need, Asian American focus groups emphasized the importance of targeting training and education efforts for both professionals and parents. Also, much like those who participated in Latino focus groups, Asian American participants stressed the importance of having bilingual staff available who could facilitate communication between home and school. Additional recommendations which emerged from Asian American focus group discussions included community outreach efforts to educate the Asian American community about disabilities and the range of services available to children and families, training for parents to inform and educate them about special education services within the schools, and initiating data collection activities to monitor the placement of minority students in special education programs. The most common theme expressed among all focus groups, however, were activities and recommendations aimed at promoting parent involvement and increased participation in their child's educational program. Along with the implementation of staff development activities leading to more effective referral, assessment, and intervention strategies, efforts which helped parents to become more knowledgeable about meeting the educational needs of their child was generally seen as a major factor

which helped to address the issue of disproportionate representation in special education programs.

Recommendations

The recommendations in this section are based on an overall analysis of discussions specific to Asian American parent and professional focus groups. As such, they may be incorporated into the overall action plan shown in Appendix B. That action was initially developed as a result of information collected in Phase I activities with professional staff who served African American, American Indian, and Latino student populations. Further refined and modified in Phase II, the action plan presented in the appendix was based on needs identified in five core areas, and represents an overall strategy for addressing key issues identified focus groups of professionals and parents alike, and supported by contemporary research findings which have been conducted in the area of disproportionate representation. Reflecting what appear to be more or less "universal" concerns about the topic of disproportionate representation, the five objectives contained in the action plan were found to be highly compatible with the conclusions outlined in the policy forum report *Disproportionate Representation: A Critique of State and Local Strategies*, a study conducted by Markowitz (1996) on behalf of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. The five need areas upon which the present action plan was based include:

Need Area 1: To promote awareness of cultural and social dynamics that impact school achievement.

Need Area 2: To develop and implement effective home and school communication links with minority families.

Need Area 3: To promote practices and procedures which increase the availability of minority staff at all levels of the educational system.

Need Area 4: To clearly define the roles and responsibilities of regular and special education in the provision of services to minority students.

Need Area 5: To develop and implement assessment models and identification practices which meet the needs of minority students.

Although Asian American focus groups tended to place more emphasis in some need areas than others, it was found that a number of the needs identified are essentially the same as what had been indicated by other focus groups. This seems to suggest that even though the nature of the problem of disproportionate representation may be different for Asian Americans than other minority groups, many of the solutions may be achieved by addressing the same fundamental needs. For example, many of the issues identified in the course of professional and parent focus groups are rooted in need areas which involved increasing cultural awareness and building more effective communication with families. However, Asian American focus groups also discussed a range of issues relevant to referral and assessment practices, limited availability of Asian American role models in the schools, and few

alternatives to special education. Based on priority needs, however, recommendations to address the disproportionate representation of Asian American students in special education are described below:

- Implement professional development objectives aimed at regular and special educators who serve Asian American student populations. The professionals who participated in the Asian American focus groups could provide recommendations as to the general content which should be included in such training.

- Develop and implement action plan activities to inform Asian American communities about disabilities and the role of special education. As part of this effort, activities might include presentations to Asian American groups and organizations in Minnesota and other types of information dissemination activities.

- Increase training activities for Asian American interpreters. As indicated by focus group participants, a need exists to help interpreters become more knowledgeable about the special education process so they can more effectively communicate with families.

- Develop guidelines and standards for the referral and assessment of Asian American students for special education services and disseminate information to professionals in Minnesota.

The recommendations provided above are intended to reflect key issues and concerns raised by Asian American focus groups. Support for these recommendations can be seen in much of the work of educational researchers who have studied Asian Americans and their experiences with special education (see Annotated Bibliography in Appendix C). To a large extent, much of this research has focused on the issue of cultural awareness and family dynamics. As shown in the literature review conducted by Chang (1983, 1993) and others, a prevailing myth exists which suggests that Asian American students represent a "model minority." As a result, those who have researched this issue have hypothesized that many Asian American students in need of special education services are not being properly identified, particularly in the areas of learning disabilities. To address this issue, Leung (1982) has developed a framework to help educators appropriately refer Southeast Asian children for special education services. As indicated previously, this problem is also exacerbated by misperceptions and general lack of knowledge about disabilities within Asian American communities since the concept of disabilities is culturally bound and is often perceived as being much different in Asian countries.

The creation of effective home and school communication links with Asian Americans is another area in which training efforts need to occur. Researches such as Su (1993), Schwartz (1995), and Matsuda (1989) all offer a number of recommendations and insights which may be used to facilitate more effective communication between home and school. Quite naturally, one of the most important factors in communicating effectively is possessing knowledge about Asian culture and having an understanding how such attitudes as self-pride, "saving face," and shame impact perceptions about how disabilities are viewed by parents, including

the extent to which disabilities are acknowledged within the family (Yalung, 1992). As has been shown with those who serve American Indian and Latino populations, the use of home-school liaisons has been found to be an effective means in helping bridge gaps which exist between the home and school. Developing a cadre of trained liaisons appears to be an effective strategy which can be used for Asian American groups as well (Halford, 1996). As indicated by the Asian American focus group of professional staff, although interpreting services are available to families for language translation purposes, a need exists to help interpreters become more knowledgeable about the special education process so that they are better prepared to educate and inform families about disabilities and special education.

Similar to what was found with other minority groups, referral and assessment practices are topics which are of concern to Asian Americans as well. Although much research has been conducted over the past two decades on each of these issues, few resources currently exist for professionals working in the field of special education which can be applied in serving diverse student populations. In recognition of this problem, the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning is currently in the process of developing standards and practices in the area of referral and assessment procedures for minority students. The information obtained as a result of this effort will be a useful resource for those who are involved in the referral and assessment process for students representing all types of minority groups, including Asian Americans.

As stated in previous phases of this focus group study, the recommendations cited above are not offered as definitive, "quick fixes" to problems that are by nature difficult and complex, nor do they intend to delineate the full range of actions that will ultimately be needed to achieve a satisfactory resolution to the issue of disproportionate representation of minority youth within special education programs. What the above recommendations and the action plan in its entirety (see Appendix B) do represent, however, is a course of action that can help those who serve diverse student groups to move beyond "admiring the problem" by articulating a framework that is focused on action-oriented strategies and results. The recommendations and the plan itself are both steps that need to be taken in order to ensure that all minority students are afforded with quality programs that effectively meet their educational needs, but accomplished in a manner that demonstrates cultural competence.

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Appendix A: Summary of Key Issues—Phases I and II

The following information represents a summary listing of key areas, concerns, and issues expressed by professionals and parents who participated in Phase I and Phase II focus groups. The bulleted items are arranged by group in response to the following questions: (1) What works in special education? (2) What does not work? (3) What factors contribute to misrepresentation? (4) What are some solutions? The list is organized according to the responses of each cultural focus group.

African American

What works?

Professionals

- Team process and IEP plan
- Communication with family
- Student focus, student involvement
- Family involvement

Parents

- Individualized, one-to-one instruction
- Individual Education Plan
- Tutorial, small group instruction
- Parent advocacy
- Parent and family involvement
- Targeted goals and objectives for students
- Communication with family
- Focusing on student strengths

What does not work?

Professionals

- Early intervention...not early enough
- Need regular education involvement
- Not special education problem...regular education problem
- Standards of education—teacher expectations
- Not recognizing cultural issues...self esteem issues
- The referral process, labeling students

Parents

- Assessment practices
- Placement process and labeling of students
- Home-school communication
- Current efforts used to inform and involve parents
- Relying too much on special education to address underachievement
- Failing to notify parents of placement in school programs

What factors contribute to misrepresentation?

Professionals

- Poverty, environment
- Attitude, misconceptions, racism
- IEP and planning deficiencies
- Racism, knowledge, tolerance, attitudes, misconceptions
- Lack of collaborative efforts

Parents

- Not recognizing cultural issues
- Racism and discrimination
- Assuming students have academic problems based on race
- Services promised, but never materialized
- Referring and assessing too soon
- Lack of communication and trust
- Lack of collaborative efforts

African American (continued)

What are solutions?

Professionals

- Better trained teachers, more training
- Graduate better prepared teachers
- Regular education involvement
- Early intervention
- Role models, more minority staff

Parents

- Regular education teachers need training in identification and referral
- Improve communication between home and schools
- Promote parent involvement in the schools and child's educational program
- Focus efforts on early intervention and prevention
- Improve assessment procedures

American Indian

What works?

Professionals

- Involvement of parents and special education staff
- Due process
- Rights and protections
- Early Childhood Special Education
- Home-school liaisons
- Indian advocates
- Minority intervention teams
- Direct functional assessments
- Holistic—Whole child approach

Parents

- Involvement of parents and special education staff
- Consistency, small classes, one-to-one support
- Goal setting for student, tutorial support
- Due process rights and protections
- Early intervention services provided in the home
- After school activities
- Culturally sensitive educators
- American Indian advocate/role models in education
- Advocacy groups (e.g., PACER, Minnesota Disability Law Center)

What does not work?

Professionals

- Parents want to keep kids out of special education because the cultural norm of community is violated when singling out an individual
- Assessment
- Some assessments seem disrespectful
- Validity of assessment instruments
- High caseloads in special education programs
- High percent of students labeled as disabled
- Stigmatizing special education labels

Parents

- Large, intimidating team meetings
- Current efforts used to inform and involve parents
- Communication among educators within the district
- Assessment process is long, complicated, and confusing
- Assuming American Indian students need special education

American Indian (continued)

What factors contribute to misrepresentation?

Professionals

- Assessment practices
- Socioeconomic status/poverty
- Different cultural values
- American Indian children better at special problem-solving than verbal fluency
- Lack of teacher training
- Insensitive teachers
- Values are different
- Family stressors
- Intergenerational stress
- Need to strengthen homes
- Racism
- Written language problems

Parents

- Socioeconomic status/poverty
- Different cultural values
- Teachers not aware of culture and family dynamics

What are solutions?

Professionals

- Higher education responsibility for preservice training
- A revamped education that is more responsive to minorities
- More home-school liaisons
- Curriculum that is culturally appropriate
- Empowerment of American Indian communities
- Building communication and support in American Indian communities
- More training for teachers and administrators
- Resolving assessment and identification issues
- Better interpretation of instruments
- Early intervention...family contacts

Parents

- Improving communication between home and school
- Sponsor an open forum with educators to discuss issues
- Training for parents on their role in the educational planning process
- Empowerment of American Indian parents
- Support Minnesota Graduation Requirement initiatives
- Promote parent involvement efforts within the schools

Latino

What works?

Professionals

- Team decisions
- Parent involvement
- Home-school liaisons
- Limited English Proficient (LEP) staff, bilingual staff evaluators

Parents

- Individualized, one-to-one instructional support
- Caring teachers
- Educational programs that help, but don't shame dual language students
- Bilingual/bicultural staff

Latino (continued)

What does not work?

Professionals

- Children learn English but parents speak Spanish
- Labeling and identification
- Secondary more of problem than elementary
- Responsibility issues between regular and special education

Parents

- Children get pulled from classrooms
- Educators do not explain why students are in ESL
- Stigmatizing special education labels
- Current efforts used to inform and involve parents

What factors contribute to misrepresentation?

Professionals

- Invalid assessment models
- Over identification of Latino students
- Vague special education criteria

Parents

- Too many Latinos identified for special education because of language
- People who administer tests do not speak Spanish
- Discrimination because students have different language/culture

What are solutions?

Professionals

- Training for staff
- Increase teacher expectation
- Preservice and in-service training
- Lower student-teacher ratio
- Instructional/teaching approaches such as Project Read and whole language
- Implement Project Read
- Noncategorical approach
- More staff for fair language assessments

Parents

- School staff should be trained in Latino culture, family dynamics
- Increase current levels of communication between home and family
- Create a mentoring program to help student with homework
- Professionals who test students should speak Spanish
- Test administered to students should be available in Spanish versions
- Students should be provided with incentives to encourage learning

Appendix B: Action Plan—Phases I and II

The action plan outlined in the following section represents a culmination of issues and concerns emerging from focus groups involved in both Phase I and Phase II of this effort. Based on a process first used in Phase I, these issues and concerns were synthesized into various priority "need" areas and then transformed into operational objectives. Since many of the key issues identified by focus groups of parents and professionals converged with a fairly high degree of consistency, it was possible to condense many of these issues in five core need areas; these include:

Objectives

Promote awareness of cultural and social dynamics that impact school achievement.

Need Area 1: To promote awareness of cultural and social dynamics that impact school achievement.

Need Area 2: To develop and implement effective home and school communication links with minority families.

Need Area 3: To promote practices and procedures which increase the availability of minority staff at all levels of the educational system.

Need Area 4: To clearly define the roles and responsibilities of regular and special education in the provision of services to minority students.

Need Area 5: To develop and implement assessment models and identification practices which meet the needs of minority students.

While a high level of agreement was found with regard to the overall needs indicated as a result of key issues identified by both parent and professional groups, these groups could often show differences in terms of the types of issues emphasized within each need area. For example, racism and discrimination issues raised by parent groups contributed to the development of the need area to "promote awareness of cultural and social dynamics which impact school achievement," while the concerns of professional groups in this same area were rooted more strongly in issues involving cultural insensitivity and staff development efforts to increase awareness among education professionals. It is important to note that the needs identified as a result of this effort not only reflect priorities within Minnesota, but are highly relevant to what has been observed on a national level as well. This is best exemplified in the policy forum report *Disproportionate Representation: A Critique of State and Local Strategies*, a study conducted on behalf of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (Markowitz, 1996). Similar to the needs indicated by Phase I and Phase II focus groups in this report, a national panel of educators, advocates, state and federal government officials also indicated that priority needs existed in the areas of professional development, parent involvement, recruitment of staff which reflected greater level of diversity, and increased collaboration between the areas of regular and special education.

As each need area was transformed into an operational objective, it was often accompanied with one or more activities or strategies which could be implemented to address the need of that objective. In some cases, these activities more directly related to key issues generated by Phase I and Phase II focus groups and others were broader in scope, reflecting needs identified through contemporary research findings and were intended to address longer range capacity-building initiatives. To some extent, the action plan is "developmental," reflecting activities which are being proposed for the future and those which are in various stages of implementation. In its present form, the action plan serves as an operational framework and is best thought of as a starting point, or "staging area" for future initiatives or for evaluating current efforts. Also, it is likely that some of the proposed activities will undergo modifications and revisions as part of the decision-making process. Although one intent of the action plan is to present a comprehensive range of strategies, it does not necessarily reflect all of the initiatives which have already occurred or are currently being undertaken by CFL or in collaboration with other state agencies. Finally, while the plan is designed as an overall blueprint to guide future efforts, it does not directly address issues related to resources and funding. Rather, it is anticipated that funding sources will be clarified as objectives are refined and prepared for implementation. In doing so, it is anticipated that both state and federal funding sources can be used to implement many aspects of the plan, depending on whether federal funding sources can be secured to implement activities which are intended to im-

pact a broader, national audience. The five objectives, along with proposed activities based on the findings of educational research are outlined below:

Objective 1

Promote awareness of cultural and social dynamics that impact school achievement.

Additional efforts are needed in the development and implementation of in-service and pre-service training strategies aimed at helping teachers and other professionals gain a better understanding of the norms and unique characteristics of persons who represent diverse cultural groups. Although no one set of characteristics can be attributed to any member of any group, researchers (Cloud & Landurand, 1988; Johnson and Ramirez, 1987; Taylor, 1989) have developed some useful guidelines which need to be considered in communicating with individuals of differing cultural backgrounds. For example, according to Cloud & Landurand, (1988), "rules for touching others vary from culture to culture. They provide similar examples for "sharing space," "eye contact," and "time ordering of interaction." They have developed a multicultural training program which helps educators to use cultural information to make inferences about special education needs. Research about the unique learning styles of minority youth (Ramirez and Castaneda, 1974) serves as another example of the many resources available to promote cultural awareness and the implications it has for addressing the needs of minority youth and their families.

In her article, *Multicultural Education Training for Special Educators Working with African American Youth*, Ford (1992) asserts that specialized training must be provided to help special educators provide service from a multicultural framework. Suggesting that "many educators have not given a high priority to the positive recognition of individual differences relating to cultural backgrounds and attitudes, worldviews, values and beliefs, interests, culturally conditioned learning styles, personality, verbal and nonverbal language patterns, and behavior response mechanisms," she proposes that multicultural services include the following experiences:

- Engaging teachers in self-awareness activities to explore their attitudes and perceptions concerning their cultural group and beliefs—as well as the effects of their attitudes in terms of self-concept, academic abilities, and educational experiences.
- Exposing teachers to accurate information about various cultural ethnic groups (e.g., historical and contemporary contributions; lifestyles and value systems; interpersonal communication patterns; learning styles; parental attitudes about education and disabilities).
- Helping educators to explore the diversity that exists between, as well as within, cultural ethnic groups.
- Showing teachers how to apply and incorporate multicultural perspectives in the teacher-learning process to maximize the academic, cognitive, personal and social development of learners (e.g., assessment, curriculum; and instructional management, strategies, and materials.
- Demonstrating effective interactions among teachers, students, and family members.
- Providing training and technical assistance to special education teachers to manifest appropriate application of cultural information to create a healthy learning climate.

Although not directly linked with the topical area of multicultural education, a task force group responsible for this objective may wish to further explore issues of racism and discrimination raised by parent focus groups. Whether efforts should be directed at defining the dimensions of this concept or engaging in data collection activities to ascertain to what extent racism and discrimination exists in the schools, some effort must be made to see how pervasive this perception is among parents, students, and educators themselves to determine what action plan activities can be developed to address this area of concern. Promoting awareness of cultural and social dynamics is a major component of the new assessment guidelines that are currently being developed by the Division of Special Education.

Objective 2

Develop and implement effective home and school communication links and parent involvement activities with minority parents and families.

Various researchers (Hewison & Tizard, 1980; Marion, 1982) have offered suggestions about improving communication with minority families. For example, to facilitate communication with families who speak a language other than English, these researchers offer some straightforward guidelines which can be used by all types of educators:

1) Send messages home in the parent's native language.

2) Use an appropriate reading level.

3) "Listen" to the messages being returned.

According to Johnson & Ramirez (1987) "courtesy, sincerity, and ample opportunity and time to convey concerns can promote communication and participation by parents from different cultural backgrounds." They also recommend that educators should "support parents as they learn how to participate in the system," by adopting the role of advocate and encouraging parental participation at home. Data from focus groups indicate that home and school links are often improved by the availability of a home-school liaison who is also a member of the same minority group and is familiar with the cultural context of both school and family systems. A task force assigned to address this objective might be to examine ways these and similar strategies can be applied to increase communication and family involvement in order to recommend "best practice" guidelines which can be used by educators and other professional staff. Also, these guidelines can be disseminated to pre-service programs throughout Minnesota so they can be used in the training of future educators.

Based on the responses of parent focus groups, activities which promote parent involvement are important and needed and also a necessary component to this objective. Recently, studies and demonstration projects which have been conducted in this area have shown that many different approaches can be used to promote the involvement of African American (Tanksley, 1995), American Indian (Sears & Medearis, 1993; Nelson, 1992), and Latino (Sosa, 1996; Chavkin, 1996; Chavkin and Gonzalez, 1995) parents and families. Also, the extensive body of knowledge in the field of parent involvement accumulated as a result of efforts of Joyce Epstein and associates (1992, 1993, 1995, 1996) can also be sources of information which can be used to promote parent involvement of minority parents and families in the schools. Also, White-Clark and Decker (Undated Manuscript) and Decker (1994; 1996) offer a number of recommended strategies to help educators increase parent and family involvement in their child's educational program.

In an effort to strengthen communication links between home and school, the Division of Special Education (in cooperation with the Office of Indian Education and the Office of LEP Education) will implement a plan to provide training to home-school liaisons within the African American community. Based on the successful models of home-school communication which have emerged as a result of programs which have been implemented over the past two decades with Native American and bilingual liaisons, training will be provided to address communication problems which currently exist between African American families and schools. Also, the division has engaged in an extensive process of translating due process materials in various language formats (e.g., Somali, Hmong, Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, Spanish, and Russian) to help inform parents and families of their educational rights and to facilitate communication about the special education process between home and school.

■ Objective 3

Promote practices and procedures which increase the availability of minority staff at all levels of the educational system.

The absence of minority personnel in education was noted by those who participated in the parent focus groups, where it was suggested there were insufficient numbers of persons to whom students could look to as role models and mentors. In addition, they indicated there were few minority persons available to serve students as advocates, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and assessment personnel. One focus group member said "I believe there's not enough minorities to work with children who do need special education," while another stated "To be honest, I haven't seen an Indian teacher in this city yet...is there any? I've never seen one." Comments of this nature were also recorded in Phase I, where professionals noted that the availability of minority staff has not kept pace with the rapidly changing demographics in the metropolitan school system. As a result, the relative disproportion of minority to non-minority staff has been a source of concern not only from the standpoint of establishing role models for youth, but also from the perspective of achieving what one focus group member referred to as "cultural competence."

A task force assigned to accomplish this objective might study and recommend strategies ensuring that the interests of minority youth and families are fully represented on planning teams. Also, persons

working on this objective may wish to collaborate with other state agencies to study strategies that will promote the identification, recruitment, and retention of minorities within the educational community. Resources to study this issue might include that of the North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL, 1990), a research lab that tracked the recruitment of minority teachers in the Midwest states, including Minnesota. In addition to providing information about minority recruitment efforts within these states, the NCREL also offers strategies which have been implemented to address this issue. Other resources such as Ramirez (1990) and Obiakor and Utley (1993) may also be consulted to further examine issues related to recruitment and retention and pre-service and in-service training.

Objective 4

Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of regular and special education in the provision of services to minority students.

Even with the increasing emphasis on such strategies as the use of regular education prereferral interventions and inclusive educational practices in the past decade, the role of special education is still often seen as the only option for students who struggle with academics or who exhibit what have been termed as "hard to teach" behaviors. This theme was clearly conveyed by Phase I focus group members along with the attendant problem of having to label minority youth in order for them to receive assistance. While the parent focus groups involved in Phase II did not explicitly discuss issues related to defining the roles of regular and special education, it was also clear from their comments that they supported the notion of tutorial and small group instruction and that such support did not always have to be delivered in a special education setting. Members of these groups discussed several alternatives, including specialized study halls staffed by content area teachers, Section 504 plans, assistance provided by private tutors and agencies such as Sylvan Learning Centers, and support services available through home-school liaison and counseling staff.

While this objective is complex and to some degree contingent upon the outcomes of other objectives involved in this operational framework, persons who assume responsibility for this objective can engage in an ongoing process to help identify equally effective instructional alternatives other than special education. One objective might be to develop a process (e.g., needs assessment) schools can use to determine the range of alternatives which currently exist in order to identify options that might meet the educational needs of minority youth. The Division of Special Education has addressed the issue of defining the roles of regular and special educators through its referral and assessment projects carried out during the 1996-97 year. A similar initiative planned for the 1997-98 year will also address this objective area.

Objective 5

Develop and implement assessment models and identification practices which meet the needs of minority students.

As has been suggested by a number of researchers (Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihls, 1986; Swedo, 1987) and observed by several members of the various focus groups, it is not an uncommon practice for some educators to continuously administer assessments until a learning or behavioral disability is "found." Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihls (1987) state that "what is required to reverse the so-called legitimizing function of assessment can be termed an advocacy orientation." Using language differences as an example, they recommend a more thoughtful approach to determining and applying eligibility criteria to students from minority groups by focusing on:

1) the extent to which children's language and culture are incorporated into the school program;
2) the extent to which non-English speaking children are encouraged to use both their first and second languages actively in the classroom to amplify their experiences in interacting with other children and adults; and
3) the extent to which educators collaborate with parents in a shared enterprise.

Based on comments by focus group members involved in Phase I activities, direct, functional assessment, performance-based measures and controlled learning trials are techniques which might be used more consistently as an alternative to current approaches. In their book, Assessment and Placement of Minority Students, Samuda, Kong, Cummins, Lewis, and Pascual-Leone (1991) provide a comprehensive outline of strategies which can be used by educational agencies to develop and implement policies with regard to the assessment and placement of minority students in special education programs. Those involved in parent focus groups in Phase II also expressed their concerns about assessment, questioning whether the amount of assessment that is presently being done is really necessary and

whether it meets the educational needs of children. Rather than voicing opposition to the assessment process, participants of parent focus groups tended to concentrate on how well assessment results reflected the child as a whole. As one parent stated, "Do your testing and do your formal assessment, but there's a lot more to that child than the assessment."

In response to the issues and concerns which prompted this objective, the Division of Special Education has formed a task force to draft guidelines for assessing American Indian and African American students. It is worthwhile to note that the guidelines developed by this incorporated various recommendations made by focus group members with regard to such subject areas as promoting the utilization of home-school liaisons, implementing parent involvement strategies, and increasing cross-cultural understanding of diverse groups within society. By using a task force approach to address this objective, current assessment procedures and policies can be reviewed and revised in order to make "best practice" recommendations for teachers and related personnel.

Appendix C: Annotated Bibliography

On Cross-Cultural Communication: Why a Positive Answer Should Not Be Taken Seriously

Lily I. Wen Sue

A discussion of cultural differences in politeness in speech focuses on differences between and among American, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean cultural patterns and the role that language can play in creating misunderstanding. It is argued that effective intercultural communication requires cultural competence. Examples are offered concerning a variety of situations: response to invitations; response to compliments; the potential imprecision of literal translation; lack of pronoun usage; ambiguity in some expressions; differential mental organization as reflected in syntax and grammar; use or nonuse of the word "no"; and the need to save face. The American in an Asian culture is reminded to avoid confrontation and practice indirect speech.

A Guide to Communicating with Asian American Families. For Parents/about Parents

Wendy Schwartz

Based on "Beyond Culture: Communicating with Asian American Children and Families," a digest published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. The enrollment of Asian and Pacific Islander (API) students is increasing rapidly, so it is important for school personnel and community members to learn to communicate with API families. This guide describes how the backgrounds and cultures of the various API groups affect their attitudes and behavior. The three general ethnicities within the API community are Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asians, and East Asians. It is important not to generalize an understanding of one group to another. In general, however, APIs see teachers as professionals with authority over their children's schooling. They believe that parents should not interfere and may regard teachers who seek parent participation as incompetent. East Asians in particular value formal education and may place high expectations on their children. Language may be a barrier to many API children, and cultures pose many opportunities for misunderstanding. Good communication depends on respect for API cultural beliefs, communication in person rather than in writing, clear communication of such details as meeting times, and maintaining a professional's role. Explaining aspects of American culture, especially that parent participation is a tradition in American schools, can be very helpful. To avoid putting unnecessary pressure on API students, it is important to reject the stereotype that most Asian students are gifted and that APIs are generally docile. School personnel and community leaders should work with local API organizations to enhance communication.

Reaching Out to Their Cultures--Building Communication with Asian-American Families

Wenju Shen & Weimin Mo

This paper discusses some misconceptions about Asian American elementary school and secondary school students, and describes ways of building effective communication with the families of these students. The essay begins by noting the stereotyping of Asian American students as "whiz kids" and discussing the damaging effect of that characterization for individual Asian American students. In reality, many Asian American students are not intellectually gifted, and many difficulties and problems exist among newly-immigrated families. A second section gives an overview of some key Asian American cultural values, focusing on views of family and the relationships between parents and children as they differ from mainstream U.S. culture. Also considered are Asian American parents' attitudes toward school, their expectation that schooling should be in the hands of educational professionals, parental sacrifice for children, and parents' imposition of guilt on their children. Recommendations for improved practice include language help with communication for parents, staff training in Asian American and Asian culture, special orientation for Asian American parents, school communication and interaction with the Asian American community, and face-to-face conversations and home visits.

Asian Pacific American Students: A Diverse and Complex Population

Valerie Ooka Pang—Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education

Although to many educators Asian Pacific American students seem to look and be alike and are perceived as model minority students, they actually represent many diverse cultural groups and complex communities, both recently arrived and of long standing in the United States. Difficulties that may arise between the new immigrant and U.S.-born populations having roots over 200 years in the United States mirror those that can surface among ethnic groups of vastly differing Asian backgrounds. Asian Pacific American students bring a variety of languages to schools. Their self-concepts and psychological needs vary greatly, and their academic achievement is not as uniformly excellent as is popularly supposed. Prejudice and ethnic bias affect the Asian Pacific American student as they do all minority groups. Research on educational issues such as learning and communication styles is necessary to determine the differing patterns of the various ethnic groups. Educators must discard their beliefs in the homogeneity of Asian Pacific Americans and determine the real needs of these children.

Asian American Education and the National Education Goals

Sau Lim Tsang —The Issues of Language and Culture: Proceedings of a Symposium Convened by the Center for Applied Linguistics (Washington, D.C., October 5, 1992)

As part of a symposium on issues related to diversity and American education reform in the context of Goal 3 of the National Education Goals, this paper summarizes the general educational achievement of Asian American students (excluding Pacific Islanders). The diversity of the group is discussed and it is noted that simple generalizations do not provide information on the large number of low achievers and their needs for better and more appropriate instructional programs. Data are presented to show that recent immigrant students in U.S. secondary schools are making slower progress in English than other groups, in spite of comparatively high achievement in mathematics. Three factors affecting Asian American students' academic achievement are discussed: immigration and refugee policy, time spent on learning, and sensitivity to job openings under conditions of equal employment opportunity. The following questions are raised: (1) Who are the Asian American students meeting and not meeting the mathematics competencies and what accounts for the differences? (2) If many Asian Americans are not doing well in American schools, is there anything wrong with the schools? (3) What happens to the large number of Asian American students in higher education? and (4) How do Asian Americans perform when compared to students in other countries?

Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth

Stacey J. Lee—Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027 (1996)

The model minority image of Asian Americans authorizes the flat denial of racism and structures of racial dominance and silences those who are not economically successful. This book explores how young people incorporate, interpret, and make meaning of the "model minority" stereotype in the context of their lived experience in school and community. It presents an ethnographic study of a public high school and identifies four distinct identities young Asian Americans constructed for themselves (Asian American, Asian, Korean, and Asian new wave). How these identities relate to each other and to the model minority stereotype was studied through contact with 87 Asian American high school students and semistructured interviews with 47. Additional information was obtained through in-depth contact with eight student informants. While the model minority stereotype may appear positive or flattering, it actually is dangerous because it tells Asians and other minorities how to behave and it promotes an invisibility that masks their problems.

Reexamination of the Model Minority Stereotype: An Analysis of Factors Affecting Higher Education Aspirations of Asian American Students

H. Heather Kim and James R. Valadez—Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (20th, Orlando, FL, November 2-5, 1995).

This study explored the model minority stereotype by examining the differences between Asian American students and other racial groups in terms of higher education aspirations, academic achievement, and socioeconomic characteristics. It is based on subset of data from the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study, namely 973 Asian American, 939 African American, 934 Latino, and 974 white 10th graders. The study compared student socioeconomic influences and numerous variables affecting academic aspiration and achievement. It concluded that unlike the generally-held perception, the achievement of Asian American students as a group is not shared by all Asian American students. Although Asian Americans as a group excelled over white, African American, and Latino students, higher educational level does not appear to lead to higher occupational status for Asian Americans, as it does for white Americans. The study also found that South Asians tended to have the highest academic achievement of all Asian American groups, followed by Chinese, Southeast Asians, Koreans, Filipinos, and Japanese. Parental expectations, self-concept, and vision appeared to be the most important factors affecting higher education aspiration, regardless of the racial background of the students. An appendix provides frequency distributions, regression models, and other statistical data.

The Other Side of the Asian American Success Story

Wendy Walker Moffat, —The Jossey-Bass Education Series (1995)

A primary purpose of this book is to show the danger of racism and inaccuracy in the often-told Asian American success story by telling about the other side of Asian American academic success. Outlining an approach to family-based multicultural education, the book provides a model for paraprofessional, bicultural counselors to meet the needs of students, their parents, and school administrators. The book opens with the story of a Hmong girl that illustrates the difficulties often encountered by Hmong and other Southeast Asian children in their efforts to pursue an American education. Chapters 1 and 2 provide background information about the Hmong and other Asian Americans. Chapter 3 describes the experiences of Hmong children in two school districts in California and on the east coast. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on cultural influences and the challenges that exist in the present school system. Chapter 6 offers a theory of family-based multicultural education to counter the deficit theories that have been at the root of schools' inadequate responses to the needs of immigrants. Teaching methods are not as important as teacher attitudes, which should reflect a belief in cultural difference as strength.

Asian American Concerns. The Report of the Chancellor's Task Force

New York City Board of Education, Brooklyn, N.Y. (1989)

The rosy picture that Asian-American youth are academic successes by almost any gauge does not in fact hold true for many Asian-American students. These students, who make up 7.3 percent of the population of the public schools, are dropping out at a disturbing rate, and those who remain in school face an array of problems such as harassment from their peers, classes that are inappropriate for their achievement levels, language and cultural conflicts, and educators who ignore their problems because they expect Asian children to be perfect. The Asian-American community and the Chancellor of the New York City Board of Education established a Task Force to study the needs of Asian-American students. The following were identified as areas that most heavily affect the education of Asian-American children: (1) human resources; (2) program development in curriculum and guidance services; and (3) parent involvement. Schools at present are not adequately staffed, nor are the existing staff adequately trained to adapt teaching or counseling to the values and experiences of Asian students. Current school programs do not bridge the differences between values of Asian countries and those of the United States, and parents have not been effectively targeted to encourage their active involvement in their children's education.

Maximizing Vietnamese Parent Involvement in Schools

My Luong T. Tran—NASSP-Bulletin; v76 n540 p76-79 Jan 1992

Many Vietnamese parents do not understand their right and responsibility to participate in decision-making processes affecting their children's education. This article discusses the information dissemination, logistical support, authentic dialogue, and parental empowerment techniques crucial to ensuring the Vietnamese community's active role in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs tailored to their children's educational needs and demands.

Effects of Home and School Learning Environments on the Academic Achievement of Eighth-Grade Asian American Students

Shwu yong L.Huang—Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995)

This study attempts to build on research that has already been conducted to explore some of the factors that differentiate learning environments that may influence the academic achievement of Asian-American students. Their learning environments, in terms of parent guidance, teacher support, class order, satisfaction, and teaching quality, were studied with attention to gender and language spoken at home. Subjects were 1,527 eighth-grade Asian Americans of differing ethnic backgrounds from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. The student questionnaire and results from a battery of eighth-grade tests were used to gather student data. In general, Asian-American students had favorable learning environments at home and in school. Students reported good parent support, positive teacher support, good teaching quality, and satisfaction. Girls had a more favorable perception of parental guidance and class order than did boys. Language-minority students reported less parental guidance and lower class order than students from English-speaking families, and this was coupled with lower achievement in reading and science standardized test scores. The implications of these findings for educational policy and practice are discussed. Three tables present study findings, and the Student Learning Environment Survey is included.

Help for Mainstream Teachers with LEP Students

Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis, Minnesota (1994)

This booklet of individual handouts was prepared to assist Minneapolis mainstream school teachers to work with limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. Topics discussed include current research on how LEP students best learn in mainstream classes, social versus academic English, and adapting instructional procedures for and integrating LEP students into the regular classroom. Classroom management models are presented as well as recommendations for parent/family involvement meetings, especially for students from Cambodia and Laos. Asian cultural values are reviewed, and self-concept builders for the students are suggested, including what a second language learner may bring into the classroom in terms of cultural differences, nonverbal communication; and interpersonal skills. (NAV)

The Hmong in Rural Areas: Critical Issues in Special Education

Landa J.; Iverson and Judith J. Krabo—In Montgomery, Diane, Ed. Rural America: Where All Innovations Begin. Conference Proceedings (Savannah, GA, March 11-13, 1993)

This paper discusses differences between the Hmong culture and American culture and resulting implications for provision of special education services. The Hmong population in the Fresno County (California) area has consistently grown since 1977, reaching approximately 26,500 in 1990. The major reason that Hmong refugees settled in agricultural Fresno is that, both in China and later in Laos, agriculture was their mainstay. To insure survival, many of their legends and folklore focus on getting along and surviving within a majority group, while maintaining their independence and identity. The Hmong have cultural values and beliefs strongly rooted in ancestor worship, animism, and group reliance. Young Hmong children are held, carried, and allowed to develop in their own time. In contrast, American children are encouraged early in life to be independent and are expected to develop according to established developmental time tables. Additionally, religion and superstition play a big role in daily Hmong life. Traditional religious values are tied to the clan shaman and trained herbalists. The shaman's practice of medical and psychological diagnosis and treatments that leave marks on the skin can be misconstrued as child abuse. Because of language barriers and the Hmong belief that a

child's current functioning is all that a child is capable of being, it is difficult to explain to parents the distinctions between a child's potential to perform and actual performance. This paper suggests that the coordination of a multidisciplinary assessment is critical to the eventual success of Hmong students with special needs. Additionally, the assessment and the individual education plan must consider critical cultural issues.

Providing Cross-Cultural Support Services to Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families

Jenelle Slobof and Others—University of Minnesota, The Institute on Community Integration (UAP), 150 Pillsbury Drive, S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455

This module presents information for training paraprofessional school staff on providing cross-cultural support services to individuals with disabilities and their families. Both a facilitator's edition and a student's edition are provided. Chapter 1 offers an introduction to diversity and direct service and includes sections on terminology and cultural competence. Chapter 2 discusses self-identification and ways to learn about other cultures. Chapter 3 provides information on institutional cultural competence, including institutional and media bias. Individual cultural competence is discussed in chapter 4. Chapter 5 looks at similarities and differences between cultures. Using culturally sensitive and inclusive language is reviewed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 gives tips on being a culturally competent paraprofessional. Chapter 8 reviews previous information. The facilitator's edition offers learning activities and information sheets to be used as transparencies. A glossary of terms and a resource list of videotapes, books, journal articles, newsletters, and other publications are appended.

Developing Cross-Cultural Competence: A Guide for Working with Young Children and Their Families

Eleanor W. Lynch & Marci J Hanson—Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., P.O. Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285-0624 (1992).

This book is a guide for early intervention practitioners who are working with families from diverse cultural backgrounds, which aims to help users to develop cross-cultural skills. The volume is organized into three parts. Part I provides an introduction to issues surrounding working with families from diverse backgrounds. Part II, the core of the book, introduces several of the major cultural and ethnic groups that make up the population of the United States, with each group described in terms of its history, values, and beliefs with particular emphasis on issues related to the family, child rearing, and disability. The groups covered include the following types of families: (1) Anglo European; (2) Native American; (3) African American; (4) Latino; (5) Asian American; (6) Philippine; (7) Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander; and (8) Middle Easterner. Part III synthesizes the information presented in earlier sections and provides recommendations for interventionists working in service delivery systems with the intention of enhancing the sensitivity and awareness of service providers to issues of variability across families in childbearing, health care, and communications.

Asian American Students At Risk: A Literature Review. Report No. 8

Sau Fong Siu—Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk, Baltimore, MD (1996)

This literature review assesses the state-of-the-art in research on Asian American students in public schools who are at risk of academic failure. Risk factors examined are language background, ability, history of schooling, timing and reasons for coming to the United States, emotional trauma and vulnerability, ethnic group affiliation, identity, motivation, and sense of self-efficacy. Interventions are examined that are designed exclusively for Asian American students or include Asian American participants.

Addressing Minority Overrepresentation in Special Education: Cultural Barriers to Effective Collaboration

Pamela Luft—Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (73rd, Indianapolis, IN, April 5-9, 1995).

This paper examines the cultural differences that arise because of disability, ethnicity, and social status and their impact on assessment practices, programming, goal setting, and the special education processes established by legislation, especially in light of the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. Suggestions for resolving existing cultural barriers include encouraging parent groups to become involved and providing professionals with culturally competent information and suggested practices. The paper considers the conceptual discrepancies and cultural barriers that exist between minority families and the special education system. Overrepresentation of minorities in special education is discussed in terms of historical patterns, assessment procedures, and legal suits and legislation. A section on definitions and stratifications considers minority classifications, disability categories, and class and status categories. Parental rights in special education as documented by court litigation and legislation are reviewed. Existing cultural differences are identified through consideration of typically American cultural values, contrasting values of identity, contrasting views of disability, and contrasting views of relationships. Implications of cultural differences for parental involvement in the schools are discussed. Specific recommendations to increase parental involvement are offered.

Disproportionate Representation: A Critique of State and Local Strategies. Policy Forum Report

Joy Markowitz—Project FORUM, Washington, DC (September 14-15, 1995). Final Report.

This document reports on the purpose, implementation, and outcomes of a policy forum on strategies used to address the disproportionate number of students from minority ethnic/racial groups receiving special education. Participants included representatives of state education agencies, local education agencies, the university/research community, general education, the Office for Civil Rights, and advocacy groups. The policy forum's purpose was to critique preliminary findings of a case-study investigation in three states and to identify specific strategies for addressing the disproportionate representation problem. Strategies were identified for the following six areas: (1) the importance of school staff trained to work with culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse students and recruitment of staff reflecting this diversity; (2) the need for ongoing professional development opportunities for school personnel in such areas as positive classroom management, effective instructional practices, and non-biased assessment; (3) the need to inform and involve communities in addressing issues of disproportionality; (4) the need for involving parents early in the child's school career; (5) the need for closer collaboration between general and special educators; and (6) the need for special education data, disaggregated by race/ethnic group, to understand disproportionality and focus strategies. A list of forum participants and the agenda are attached.

Disproportionate Representation of Students from Minority Ethnic/Racial Groups in Special Education: A Policy Forum To Develop Action Plans for High Priority Recommendations

Joy Markowitz—Project FORUM, Pentagon City, Virginia (August 25-26, 1994). Final Report

This paper reports on the design, purpose, implementation, and outcomes of a policy forum on disproportionate representation of students from minority ethnic/racial groups in special education. The purpose of this policy forum was to develop an action agenda for implementation of two recommendations assigned a high priority by a group of stakeholders: (1) prereferral strategies should be an integral part of the educational process and should be made available to service providers prior to the initiation of a formal assessment, and training should be provided in this area; and (2) training should be provided to address the diverse learning strengths and needs of an increasing heterogeneous student population, including training in the area of parent/professional collaboration, and family members from different ethnic/racial backgrounds should be used as resources. Two speakers offered remarks: Robert Solomon on prereferral strategies and Beth Harry on home-school collaboration. Forum participants then identified compelling reasons to implement the recommendations, barriers to implementation, and critical components of an implementation plan. Appendixes contain a participant list, a list of background materials for the forum, an agenda, and tips for successful prereferral.

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