ABOUT THE ORIGINAL STUDY

Ethnoracial Diversity of the Special Educator Workforce Over Time

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Why It Matters

Students with disabilities are increasingly ethnoracially diverse, but their teachers remain predominantly White. This study examines changes in special educator diversity and the scale of the representation gap.

Data and Sample

The study combines multiple national datasets to examine special educators and students with disabilities from 2012–2021. Its parity projections depend on explicit assumptions about staffing ratios, preparation, entry, and retention.

Key Findings

- Growth in special educators of color did not keep pace with growth in students of color with disabilities.
- The gap between observed staffing and the number needed for proportional representation widened under the study's staffing-ratio assumptions.
- The authors' projections show why small pipeline improvements alone are insufficient to achieve parity quickly; these are scenarios, not observed future outcomes.

Policy Implications

- Coordinate race-conscious recruitment and retention efforts across preparation programs and school districts, as the authors recommend.
- Reduce financial and exclusionary barriers to preparation while supporting culturally responsive and sustaining practice across the workforce.
- Improve national workforce data and evaluate initiatives intended to attract and sustain special educators of color.

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