

**Does Teacher Bias Contribute to the
Overidentification of Minority Students in Special Education?**

by
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A doctoral thesis submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies,
College of Education,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Professional Leadership

in Special Populations

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December 2020

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother, Mary, and my Aunt Pearl. Without each of you in my corner, I would not have made it to where I am. I also dedicate this to all the little black boys, like me, who dare to dream. I can, you can, we can.

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Dr. Kent, my committee chair, for your guidance throughout this time. You have been patient, and I truly appreciate the endless hours you have put into assisting me with the completion of this momentous project.

Thank you, Dr. Cobb, for assisting with the stats and keeping me sane (we know how difficult that can be). Thank you, Dr. Hassett, for jumping in and being a part of this journey. Dr. Lewis, your friendship and constant cheers have kept me afloat while working through this process. Thank you so much for being here with me.

I express my gratitude to the Spring Independent School District, specifically Peg Sherwood and Ayana Lebron. The two of you allowed me to leave a few minutes early to attend classes on Wednesday afternoon. You have given me the ability to blossom as a leader and utilize the skills I have learned in this program on my job. Thank you for the opportunity, support, and freedom to be who I am.

Abstract

Background: Previous research and data suggest that minority students have a disproportionate representation in special education programs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 indicated that disproportionate representation of minority students, specifically African American students identified with an intellectual disability, was a problem facing school districts in the country. According to recent data the problem of disproportionate representation in special education persists. Some of the potential causes of the disproportionate representation are implicit bias, socioeconomic status, and bias within the referral process. This study will look at the referral process and determine if there is bias within the referral process that leads to the overidentification of minority students in special education. **Purpose:** The purpose of the study was to examine potential teacher bias that might impact the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. More specifically, this research aimed to determine whether there was bias in the referral process. The following research questions were posed: (a) What student-level information do teachers report as most important for determining referral for special education, and does this differ based on teacher demographics? (b) Are there differences in referral information emphasized by teachers based on the race/ethnicity of the student in presented scenarios? (c) Are there differences in teacher ratings of recommendation for referral to special education based on student race/ethnicity ? (d) Are there differences in teacher ratings of the likelihood to refer students for a special education evaluation based on teacher race/ethnicity or experience?

Methods: One hundred nine elementary teachers from an urban, Houston-area school participated in the study. Teachers provided demographic data about themselves,

including race/ethnicity and years of experience. Each teacher read one of six randomly presented scenarios with accompanying data about a student and answered questions related to whether or not a referral to special education was warranted. Scenarios were vetted by a focus group, which all agreed on which student should and should not have been referred to special education. Frequency data were gathered and ANOVA was utilized to determine if there were significant differences in how the students in the scenarios were referred based on the race/ethnicity of the teachers, years of teaching experience, or race/ethnicity of the student in the scenario. **Results:** Overall, teachers reported utilizing overall student profiles for decision making rather than other specific data, though descriptively, less experienced teachers were more likely to utilize anecdotal data or standardized test scores. Frequency data did not show a difference in data used by teachers based on the race/ethnicity of the student in the scenario. There was no significant difference in the teacher ratings of referral for students based on student race/ethnicity. There were also no significant differences in the referral ratings when looking at the teacher demographics. One key finding was overall, teachers were more likely to be in agreement with the focus group decision on referral when they thought a referral was not necessary (86.5%) than they were when they thought a referral was necessary (43.9%). **Conclusions:** The results point to a need for teacher professional development regarding the referral process for special education, including data-based decision making and implicit bias training. Future research should focus on Response to Intervention and the referral process.

Keywords: special education, teacher bias, overidentification, overrepresentation

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The mission and purpose of education are to ensure that all students in the state have access to a quality educational system that prepares them for their future according to the State of Texas. The Texas Education Code outlines that Texans who complete their secondary schooling should be able to participate in social, economic, and future educational opportunities fully. This mission is rooted in the idea that students who complete formal education within the state can become a contributing member of society (Texas Education Code, 2017).

Students identified as having a disability typically do not have the same access to favorable outcomes as other students. Graduation rates for students with disabilities were 65.5% in 2015–2016, more than 18 percentage points below the national graduation rate for all students in the same year of 84.1% (Heasley, 2017). *The Condition of Education* reported that 69% of students with disabilities graduated with a regular high school diploma, 11% graduated with an alternative diploma, and the other 18% of the students dropped out of school (McFarland et al., 2018). Of those, 62% of African American students and 66% of Hispanic students graduated with a regular high school diploma, proportions lower than the average for all students with a disability, while 14% of African American and 12% of Hispanic students graduated with an alternative diploma, proportions higher than the average for all students with disabilities. According to the *National Longitudinal Transition Study* (Newman et al., 2011), after graduation 13% of students with disabilities enter a 2-year college, 6.4% enter a trade school, and 7.6% enter a 4-year college upon graduation. By comparison, general education students entered 2-

year colleges at a rate of 11.8% and 4-year colleges at a rate of 29.2%. These statistics show that students with disabilities are at a disadvantage when it comes to graduating high school, which also puts them at a disadvantage for having favorable postsecondary success.

According to McFarland et al. (2018), 77% of students receiving special education services are students in a minority group. Specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004), commonly referred to as IDEA, indicates that African American students have been overrepresented in special education. The act stated that African Americans made up 17.4% of the students identified with an intellectual disability as opposed to only 10.3% of the entire student population. Likewise, 11.3% of African American students were identified as having an emotional disturbance (ED) as compared with 8.1% of the student population (IDEA, 2004). Zhang et al. (2012) stated that although the number of students in special education is decreasing, minority students continue to have higher percentages of representation in special education.

Problem of Practice

The specific problem of practice of interest in this study is the continued overrepresentation of minority students in special education. More specifically, this study will focus on the overrepresentation of African American and Hispanic (Latino) students identified with an ED, intellectual disability (ID), and a specific learning disability (SLD).

African American and Hispanic students are identified in these categories of disabilities at a higher rate than are their White peers. According to the IDEA Section 618

Data Products: State-Level Data Files (2011) contained on the U.S. Department of Education website, African American students represent 27% of the students identified with an ED, 28% of those identified with an LD, and 19% of those identified with an SLD. Hispanic students represent 14% of students identified with an ED, 21% identified with an ID, and 28% of those identified with an SLD. Snyder et al. (2019) in 2011 reported White students made up 51.7%, African American students represented 15.8%, and Hispanic students made up 23.7% of the total enrollment of all students in the United States. The data support the contention that African Americans are overrepresented in all three eligibility areas (i.e., ED, ID, SLD), and Hispanic students are overrepresented in the area of SLD.

There are various potential causes of the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. Teachers, principals, counselors, other professionals and parents refer students to special education. However, the majority of the referrals come from educational staff. Because the staff is responsible for making the referral, there appears to be a bias amongst staff members in the students they identify as needing a referral for special education. This study aims to focus on biases that may be evident within the structure for initiating referrals for a special education evaluation. According to one study, “Overrepresentation in itself does not necessarily imply that the system does not work; bias, however, does have this implication” (Gaviria-Soto and Castro-Morera, 2005, p. 539).

Since the majority of the educational staff in the United States are White while nearly one-half of the student population (K–12) in the United States represent students from a minority group (McFarland et al., 2018), this can create an issue of understanding

the minority culture. Cultural differences can lead to a lack of understanding between parties. If bias exists in the system, then the starting point for intervention is education and cultural sensitivity training aimed at enlightening the staff to the needs of the students they serve—the training changes depending on the teachers and the community at large.

While culture may be one factor that allows for bias, socialization is another (Baker, 2005). It is easy for educators to mischaracterize students due to implicit bias. An example of the mischaracterization of students would be a teacher referring a student to be assessed for a disability rather than providing the student with interventions or differentiated instruction to meet the student's academic and social needs. The mischaracterization does not appear to come from an active effort. The mischaracterization instead comes from a lack of understanding of the socialization that has occurred for the student. With teachers and students coming from various backgrounds, misunderstanding each other is easy. It is the teacher who has to reconcile the differences and make an effort to understand each student fully.

Impact

The purpose of the research is to identify the potential bias of teachers that exists within the system of referral to special education. If bias does exist within the system, then it should be identified as either an implicit bias or prejudice. By definition, implicit bias indicates a process that happens unconsciously. Everyone is said to have some implicit bias, “regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or age” (Staats, 2016, p. 30). With this information, the staff can make necessary changes in the process used to refer students to special education. Providing the instructional staff the resources to understand implicit bias will have the most substantial impact on students and their families. The long-term

impact of the research would be on student referrals. If staff are better able to understand the impacts culture, language, and ethnicity have on learning, the staff would make fewer inappropriate referrals to special education for minority students.

Teachers who teach in predominately Hispanic neighborhoods would need different training about the Hispanic community than a teacher teaching in a predominately African American neighborhood. Also, teachers would need overall training in understanding the difference between culture, race, and ethnicity, as well as the impact that these various components have on a student. A case study completed by Wiggan and Watson (2016) demonstrates that a private school of 100% African American students and teachers outperforms many of the surrounding schools in the area. The disadvantages associated with the surrounding low-income community do not appear to reduce the positive effect of the cultural responsiveness of the administration and staff to the students' needs.

Family dynamics also play a role in how students learn and in the perception of the student. The instructional staff needs to understand how to deal with different families to build a relationship with the family units. Families can support the efforts of the school when they work in conjunction with the educational staff. This relationship is something to be fostered because of a lack of awareness of the cultural differences that exist within families. Many times, the educational staff may have a negative view of the family. Likewise, minority families are not always trusting of the educational institution. Building these alliances and trust through understanding and empathy helps the students to achieve.

National Context

Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act of 2004

The Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) is the law that governs special education in the United States. The act states that the state must have policies and procedures in place to prevent “inappropriate overidentification or disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of children with disabilities” (IDEA, 2004). IDEA also mandates that the state must monitor the local education agency (LEA) in critical indicators such as the disproportionate representation of minority students. IDEA outlines the nation’s stance on the overidentification and disproportionate representation of minority students in special education

IDEA also outlines the referral process for students. Students being referred for a SLD must undergo a response to intervention (RTI) process before the referral being made for special education. Also, one of the exclusionary conditions for identifying a student as having an SLD is whether or not a student has had proper access to the general education curriculum in the areas of reading, math, and writing. The RTI process incorporates scientific evidenced-based interventions and progress monitoring to ensure that students have the opportunity to exhaust relevant general education interventions before being placed in special education. The information collected through the RTI process gives vital data to the individualized educational program (IEP) team as it makes decisions regarding eligibility, placement, and programming for students if they are identified as special education eligible. In sum, the utilization of such practices should emphasize data-based decisions regarding referrals rather than other, more qualitative judgments.

Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 is the act that governs all education within the United States. The purpose of ESSA, as outlined in the act, is to ensure that all students, including minority students and those with disabilities, have an opportunity to receive a high-quality, fair, and equitable education that closes the achievement gap. One of the critical points in the ESSA is that individual states are required to monitor the quality of teachers who teach minority students. States are required to track whether or not minority students are being educated by teachers who may be ineffective, inexperienced, or "out-of-field," meaning that the teacher has not studied education. These qualities of teachers will have an impact on whether or not minority students have access to the educational system as it is designed.

Related Research

McFarland et al. (2018) reported that 13% of the students in the United States are students with a disability. Of those identified as students with a disability, 23% of the students are White. Native American/Alaskan Native, 17%; African American/Black, 16%; two or more races, 13%; Hispanic and Pacific Islander, are both 12%, and Asian 7% makeup the rest of the population. Zhang et al. (2012) examined the topic of the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. They noted that the 5-year trends related to minority representation in special education show a continuous overrepresentation of minorities identified as receiving special education services. The researchers found that African Americans demonstrated the highest percentages in identification across SLD, ID, and ED (Zhang et al., 2012).

Conversely, Morgan et al. (2015) dispute the notion that minorities are overrepresented in special education. More specifically, when comparing African

American students to their White counterparts, they report that African American students are 58%, 63%, and 77% less likely to be identified as having learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, intellectual disabilities, and health impairments, respectively (Morgan et al., 2015). The current study will examine how likely it is that a student would be referred to special education based on the race of the student.

State/Local Context

Rules of the Commissioner of Education for the State of Texas

The Commissioner of Education for the State of Texas has published rules (19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 33, 2017) related to identifying students with disabilities. The commissioner's rules state that prior to a student's being referred to special education, educators should consider other interventions, including response to tutorials, remediation, and scientific evidence-based interventions. These interventions would be provided for any student struggling and afforded to all students within the school.

The State of Texas is required to report data to the federal government regarding disproportionate representation within special education. According to the information provided in the *FFY 2016 State Performance Plan–Annual Performance Report Texas*, the areas reported to the Department of Education for disproportionality are compliance items. The State Performance Plan Indicator 10, which examines the number of districts with disproportionate representation of minority groups as the result of inappropriate identification, showed that 8 of the 580 school districts were considered to have disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. This is based on

set criteria, such as how many students are in a school district as well as the number of special education students overall in the school district. Currently, the state's definitions and methodologies for identifying disproportionate identification of students with disabilities are being reviewed based on legal action brought against the U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.

Texas Education Code. The Texas Education Code § 29.0011 ([TEC 29.0011\(b\)\(1\)](#)) mandates that systems shall be put in place that monitors explicitly issues related to the disproportionate representation of minority students identified for special education.

Related Data. Within Texas, African American students account for 12.6% of the population, while Hispanic students account for 52.0% of the population (Texas Academic Performance Report 2018–2019 State Student Information). Within the statewide teaching staff, 9.9% are African American, 25.6% are Hispanic, and 61.4% are White. Numbers are different in the local independent school district (Local ISD), which is the district that participated in the study. African Americans account for 40.1% of the population, Hispanic students account for 44.1% of the population, and White students account for 8.9% of the population. When looking at the school district's population of teachers, African Americans represent 36.1%, Hispanics represent 19.9%, and Whites make up 39.9%. Whites make up the largest percentage of the teaching staff but not the majority of students. Likewise, Hispanics are the majority of the student population, but Hispanic teachers are not as prevalent.

From overall numbers of students and teaching staff, it is evident within the state as well as the school district of interest in this study that the majority of teachers are not

of the same race or ethnicity as the students they teach. The information from this study will help to identify the potential presence of implicit bias in the special education referral process that may stem from these differences. If such bias exists, the ultimate goal is to help support those teachers as they work with minority students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and reduce inappropriate referrals and, in turn, the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education.

Variables

Survey data will be collected from teachers, who will answer questions related to one of six different scenarios they are sent via email. The independent variables outlined in the study will be teacher demographics, the demographics of the child in the scenario that is read, and the different scenario types (students who should be referred and students who should not be referred) given to the teachers. The teacher demographics will include years of teaching, race/ethnicity of the teacher, and type of classes taught by the teacher. The dependent variables identified in the study are the teacher's decision to make a referral of a student in the given scenario and the teacher's report of the information used to make the referral decision.

Research Questions

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What student-level information (e.g., behavior, grades, standardized test scores) do teachers report as the most important for determining referral for special education, and does this differ based on teacher demographics?
2. Are there differences in the referral information emphasized by teachers based on the race/ethnicity of the student in the scenarios?

3. Are there differences in ratings of recommendation for referral to special education based on race/ethnicity of the student?
4. Are there differences in ratings of the likelihood to refer students for a special education evaluation based on teacher race/ethnicity or experience?

The hypothesis is that teachers possess an implicit bias that impacts which students are referred to special education. The findings of the research are expected to show that when all other information presented is the same except for race, general education teachers will be more likely to refer a student to special education if that student is identified as African American or Hispanic.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Minority students continue to have disproportionate representation within special education. According to Samuels and Harwin (2018), 423 school districts in the school year 2015–2016 reported having disproportionate representation with regard to minority students. Disproportionality in the identification of minority students has been a concern for many years and has led Congress to enact legislation, including IDEA and ESSA, to address some of the issues surrounding disproportionality. There are several reasons postulated for the overrepresentation of minority students in special education, with educator bias being one of them. This study intends to determine if educator bias impacts special education referrals. The goal would be to provide information to educators that will help them to understand their own biases and the impact those biases may have on referrals to special education.

Disproportionate Representation in Special Education

Special Education Law and Data

Disproportional representation within special education is a phenomenon that has existed even before the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142). *Disproportionality* is the representation of a group or subgroup that exceeds the expectation for that group or that is different from the representation by comparison to other groups (Skiba et al., 2008). Dunn (1968) wrote about minority students being overidentified as students with a “mental retardation” (professionals now use the term *intellectual disability*). Dunn stated that the identification process used to identify students with disabilities, which is still very much the same today, was flawed.

Specifically, Dunn was referring to a school psychologist completing an intelligence scale on students and using those metrics to identify students with intellectual disabilities. It was also noted that the majority of the students who were served via special education at the time were students of minority backgrounds and included “Afro-Americans, American Indians, Mexicans, and Puerto Rican Americans; those from nonstandard English speaking, broken, disorganized, and inadequate homes; and children from other nonmiddle (sic) class environments” (Dunn, 1968, p. 6).

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Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 established the following six principles related to students with disabilities: a free and appropriate public education; educational programming and services provided in the least restrictive environment; an individualized education plan; procedural due process; nondiscriminatory assessment; and parental participation in decision-making. Within the law that changed education for students with disabilities in the United States forever, there was a guarantee that students would be identified as a student with a disability through an evaluation that would not be racially or culturally discriminatory. The language used within Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 led to language added in the subsequent legislation for students with disabilities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA), which became P.L. 101-467, also speaks to minority students being more likely to be identified as having a disability and explicitly being classified as “mentally retarded.” At the time, Congress noted that although African American students made up 12% of the population, they accounted for 28% of the special education population. Interestingly, Congress also noted that few minorities were enrolling in universities to study to become educators. The law enacted provided for outreach to historically Black colleges and universities to ensure that more of their enrolled students would pursue degrees in education.

IDEA was reauthorized again in 1997. During this reauthorization, Congress mandated that the states were required to determine if significant disproportionality existed with the identification of children with disabilities based on race. States were also charged with monitoring placement of students into certain programs and the number of

services that students receive. Under IDEA 1990 if a local education agency (LEA) was found to have significant disproportionality in either the identification of students with disabilities or the placement of students with disabilities, the LEAs would have to make changes in their policies to reflect how they would address the disproportionality issues.

The current version of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (IDEA 2004) was the reauthorization of the 1997 law. IDEA 2004 adds reporting requirements for tracking disproportionate representation of students with regard to long-term suspensions and expulsions. The long-term suspension and expulsion data are reported along with the information for disproportionality in the identification of students with disabilities and placement of students in special education programs by race. LEAs are required to submit yearly reports related to potential disproportionality, and any LEA found to have engaged in disproportionate identification, programming, or suspension of students based on race/ethnicity are required to reserve money provided via IDEA section 618 (d) for comprehensive, coordinated early intervention services to serve the significantly overidentified children.

At the time of the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, African American students made up 17.4% of the students identified as having an intellectual disability, and 8.1% of the students identified as having an ED. According to the 40th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2018), African American students in 2016 had a risk index of 2.0 of being identified as having an ED and of 2.2 for being identified as having an ID. The risk index is calculated by dividing the number of students identified as being served under IDEA in each racial category by the total number of students identified in the population for each race. This index

represents the percentage of the population that is being served via IDEA. These risk factors account for the highest risk amongst all races and ethnicities and all disabilities. Of all African American students identified as having a disability, 7.5% were identified as having an ED, 9.8% an ID, and 40.4% as having an SLD. When looking at the same information for all Hispanic/Latino students, 3.7% were identified as having an ED, 6.6% with an ID, and 46.4% with an SLD. For all White students with a disability, 5.9% were identified with an ED, 6.0% with an ID, and 34.5% with an SLD. Amongst African American and Hispanic students with a disability in 2016, the prevalence of being identified as having an ID or SLD was higher than it was for White students. African Americans continued to be identified as having the highest percentage of students bearing an ED label.

Research on Disproportionality.

Zhang et al. (2012) completed a study to examine the longitudinal trends of minority students in special education. Data was collected and reviewed from the years of 2004 through 2008. This data included information from the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates program and also from IDEA Part B collected from the Data Accountability Center funded by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs. The data were analyzed to calculate the racial makeup of each of the disability categories. Further, growth rates for representation were compared with the representation. The research aimed to identify the overall trends of the representation of minority students in special education and to determine how the groups were represented amongst the disability categories of LD, ID, and ED.

The results from Zhang et al. show that African American and American Indian/Alaskan groups represented the highest two groups proportionally in special education. There was an increase in the percentage of students in special education between 2004 and 2008 for all student groups except Hispanic students. When looking at specific disabilities, Specifically, African American, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaskan students had a higher representation for LD than did White students. African American students had the highest representation for ED and ID, followed by American Indian/Alaskan, White, Hispanic, and, lastly, Asian students. The study ultimately found that disproportionate representation of minority students continued to be a trend throughout the 5 years represented in the study. There was little change in each group's representation throughout the that time. Even though these trends were steady, the study did find that there was a decrease in the identification of African American students as having ID.

Morgan et al. (2015) completed a longitudinal study as well to examine issues of disproportionality. The data in their study was taken from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Cohort, 1998–1999. Within the study, data were collected during kindergarten, first grade, third grade, fifth grade, and eighth grade. The data collected during these periods reported whether or not a child had been identified under one of the following disability conditions of IDEA: learning disability, speech or language impairment, mental retardation, health impairment, or serious emotional disturbance. Once a student had been identified under one category, that student was removed from the group as not to be counted again during the next data collection.

Morgan et al. found that when minority students were compared with white students who had similar backgrounds, minority students were less likely to be identified as having a disability. A logit regression model was used to eliminate those confounding variables, which might otherwise impact a student being in special education. The adjusted analysis showed African American children were 58% less likely to be identified as LD, 57% less likely to be identified as mentally retarded, and 64% less likely to be identified as having an ED than White children who had similar backgrounds. For Hispanic students compared with White students of the same background, they were 29% less likely to be identified as having an LD. There was no statistical difference between the identification of Hispanic children and White children of similar backgrounds for the eligibility categories of ID and ED. This study had many limitations. One of the biggest limitations of the study was that it only followed one cohort of students. The authors also note that the study stopped with eighth-grade students and cannot account for the identification of students during high school.

McFarland (2018) notes that during the 2015–2016 school year, there were disproportionate representations amongst some of the races for specific disability types. Identification as having an SLD was lower for Asian students (21%), White students (31%), and students categorized as two or more races (30%) than among overall students (34%). As for students identified with an ED, 7% of both Black students and students who identified as two or more races were in the ED category, a percentage higher than the overall percentage of 5% among all students. Graduation rates for students also differed amongst races for students with disabilities. The graduation rate was as follows: Asian (76%), White (74%), two or more races (67%), Hispanic (66%), and Black (62%).

Hosp and Reschly (2003) completed a meta-analysis of referral rates for intervention and special education assessments based on race. The purpose of their study was to compare referral rates from students with different racial backgrounds. They completed a quantitative synthesis of the present research and presented their findings. The studies were selected based on the following criteria: distinguishing features were reported (meaning authors presented the proportion of race in their sample); research respondents had to be students in elementary, middle, and high schools or in secondary schools with students younger than 21 years of age; research methods had to include quantitative demographic information about the referred sample, including racial makeup; cultural and linguistic features included meant that the study could be applied to people within the United States; the time frame was selected for studies completed after 1975; and publication type was open to journals, books, book chapters, dissertations, technical reports, conference papers, and unpublished manuscripts.

They found significant variance amongst the referral rates for White students in comparison with both African American and Hispanic students. They also found that the rates of referrals were higher for African American and Hispanic students than they were for White students. The overall findings of the study showed that while both African American and Hispanic students were referred more often, at a rate of 132:100 and 106:100, respectively, African American students qualified for special education at a higher rate than White students, while Hispanic students had a lower qualification rate. The ratio of students who met eligibility compared with White students was 118:100 for African Americans and 89:100 for Hispanic students.

Potential Causes/Factors of Disproportionality.

There are numerous theories as to why disproportionality exists in identification of students for special education. Dunn (1968) postulated that there was bias within the tests that were administered. Much of the research regarding biases amongst standardized norm-referenced tests of intelligence and achievement has been inconclusive as to whether a bias truly exists (Skiba et al., 2008). Because the findings have been equivocal, with various researchers coming to different conclusions, there has not been a consensus on whether or not there is truly a bias within intelligence testing (Skiba et al., 2008). According to one set of researchers, when the testing data were reviewed at the item level, there was not a significant difference between the scores for African American students and scores of their White counterparts (Brown et al., 1999). The counterargument is that much of the research completed was using the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children and the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children-Revised and that neither of these tests is currently being used (Valencia & Suzuki, 2000).

One of the other causes explored by Skiba et al. (2008) is one or more sociodemographic factors, such as poverty. Information regarding poverty as the cause of disproportionate representation of minority students in special education has also led to inconsistent results. Some studies indicate there is a direct link, while others do not. Skiba and colleagues point out that there is a lack of definitive proof within the literature to support the idea that poverty causes the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. They argue that although there are poverty-related causes that can lead to higher risk factors amongst minority students, poverty itself does not directly impact disproportionality. One of the most consistent reasons for

disproportionality, as discussed by Skiba et al., is the unequal opportunity in general education.

One of the final points made by Skiba et al. (2008) is that disproportionality may be linked to the referral and identification process. Several studies, including those completed by Gottlieb et al. (1991) and Hosp and Reschly (2003), showed that minority students were more likely to be referred to special education than their white counterparts. African American students were also more likely to be referred for behavior rather than for academic concerns (Skiba et al., 2008).

One such study completed by Coutinho et al. (2002) examined the relationship between poverty and disproportionality among students with LDs. The study analyzed the civil rights data reported by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights. The effects of gender, ethnicity, and sociodemographic factors were examined. These factors were looked at in consideration of the proportion of students identified as having LDs within a school district.

The results of the study showed that disproportionality at the time was not just limited to African American students or the categories of ID and ED. There was also disproportionality amongst Native American males identified as having LDs. Coutinho and colleagues also found that increased poverty leads to an increase in the identification of LDs within minority groups, but not within groups of White students. The authors concluded that biases might be introduced at any point in the special education identification process and specifically that teachers may incorrectly refer minority students who look different from their White counterparts.

Zhang and Katsiyannis (2002) found that poverty had the opposite impact on the identification of students with disabilities. Their study examined minority representation for all states and the categories of ED, ID, and LD. They also looked at the minority representation in comparison to poverty rates for the various states. Zhang and Katsivannis collected data from the *Twenty-second Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, the National Center for Education Statistics' *Statistics in Brief*, and *Poverty in the United States*. The study examined the percentages of students that were represented within each disability category, as well as any differences between minority representation and White representation within each disability category.

Zhang and Katisvannis found that when looking at all of the students identified within each disability category, White students were third amongst or in the middle for all eligibilities. African American and American Indian/Alaskan represented the highest percentages identified amongst all disability categories, while Asian and Hispanic students were the lowest. African American students had the most representation across all eligibility. They also found that in poorer states, fewer Hispanic students were identified with a disability than they were in richer states. The study found that African Americans, American Indian/Alaskan Natives, Asian Americans, and White groups in poorer states had lower rates of being identified as having EDs.

A study completed by Serwatka et al. (1995) noted that as African American teachers increased, the rate of African American students identified as having an ED decreased. They examined programs for emotionally handicapped (EH) students (as they were called in 1995) in Florida public schools. The study sought to determine if there

were root variables that contributed to the overrepresentation of African American students in classes for the EH.; in all, they examined 15 variables. Serwatka et al. found that there was a negative correlation between the number of African American teachers present in a school and the number of African American students in an EH program. The correlations were most significant in elementary schools but had continued significance at the middle school level. Moreover, there has been much documentation concerning the quality and quantity of the education provided to minority students. The article points to several studies that have demonstrated that common curriculum and instructional practices are not geared toward minority students and students from families with low income.

Skiba et al. (2006) completed a study on various schools within the midwestern United States. The study was a multiyear project that aimed to gain insight into how minority students are treated through the referral process and to assess the knowledge that the educational staff had regarding disproportionality in special education. There were 14 elementary schools, representing seven school districts that participated in the study. A total of 64 individuals interviewed for the study: the special education director of each district, nine school psychologists who were assigned to the campuses, 20 principals and assistant principals, and 28 teachers (two from each school; one considered to have a low rate of referral and one considered to have a high rate). Of note, there were only 13 total male participants and 13 African American participants in the study. Each person completed a semistructured interview with one of 10 interviewers.

The results of the study were organized into five major themes:
“sociodemographic factors, general education factors, special education process,

available and needed resources, and perspectives on minority disproportionality and diversity” (Skiba et al., 2005, p. 1431). Within the context of the sociodemographic factors, teachers and administrators noted that students coming from poverty have risk factors that are associated with poverty. The respondents reported that they did not have the resources to meet the needs of the students who come from poverty backgrounds. There was a significant subtheme that arose within the interviews of cultural mismatch of behavior management and expectation. Because of this, Skiba et al. noted that poverty could not be the sole cause of disproportionality within this study. When looking at the general education context, the study noted that there are behavior styles associated with African American students that appear to be distinct and different from those the general education teachers are familiar with or able to handle. The respondents in this study identified high-stakes testing as a contributing factor to inappropriate referrals to special education.

The limited resources that are available to combat the high-stakes testing appears to drive the referral to special education and the disproportionate representation of minority students. When looking at the special education eligibility and decision-making process, the respondents varied. Whereas the special education directors saw the overreferrals of students as negative, school-level employees saw it as a positive. From the viewpoint of teachers, they responded that they would rather refer a student to not qualify rather than not refer a student and miss a chance of diagnosing the student for special education. Also, the teachers within the study saw special education as sometimes the only option for getting more assistance with students who struggled academically or behaviorally. The respondents also noted that there was a gap between the ability of the

teachers to manage student behavior, which could lead to a disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. In the perspectives on race and minority disproportionality, there were varying degrees of how the respondents saw the issue. While some blamed the students and the student's family for not providing adequate supports, others blamed the school for not providing adequate training. There was another group who took the perspective that maybe this is a topic that should not be discussed. Some of the respondents took the “colorblind” view in that they remarked that they did not see color or race. The majority of the respondents denied that the disproportionate representation of minority students was a race issue and rather focused more on it being a socioeconomic issue (Skiba et al., 2006).

Oswald et al. (1999) completed a mixed-methods study that examined the disproportionate identification of African American students as mildly mentally retarded (MMR) and seriously emotionally disturbed (SED). Although these eligibility categories no longer exist, they will be used in the original study. The study came about as IDEA was reauthorized, and states were required to report disproportionality data. Oswald et al. (1999) sought to describe the extent to which African American students were disproportionately identified as MMR and SED and to what extent economic, demographic and educational variables affected the disproportionate identification. The study analyzed preexisting data related to ethnicity, special education identification of MMR and SED, and other data related to demographics and economic factors at the district level. The data collected was from the Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report (U.S. Department of Education) from the fall of 1992. The data related to the fiscal information from the districts came from the National Center for

Educational Statistics Common Core Data. There were seven environmental variables selected: housing, income, poverty, at-risk, dropout, Limited English Proficient and base rate.

The results of the study indicated that African American students were 2.5 times more likely to be identified as MMR than were their peers. They were 1.5 times more likely to be identified as SED than were their peers. The study also found that the environmental variables heavily impacted the students being identified as MMR or SED. The environmental variables had an impact even when race was not considered to be a factor. When looking at how the environmental variables impacted how students were identified, Oswald et al., (1999) found that amongst students in high-poverty communities, there was little difference between rates of SED identification (non-African American students, 0.7%; African American students, 0.9%), whereas in communities where poverty was rare, the rates were dramatically different, with 1.7% of African American students being identified and 0.9% of non-African American students being identified. For classification as MMR, it was found that African Americans were identified at rates similar across all levels of poverty, and those rates were higher than they were for non-African American students.

Hosp and Reschly (2004) completed a mixed-methods study on the factors that lead to disproportionality within special education. They examined different predictors and which factors were more pertinent in predicting how students would be referred to special education. Within the study, Hosp and Reschly examined data collected from the *Elementary and Secondary Schools Civil Rights Compliance Report* (dataset of the Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, 2000), the Common Core of Data ;

National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000), and district-level achievement data that had been collected from 16 states. Because all states are not required to give the same achievement testing annually, the data collected from the states was sent to each state via email. The data was analyzed using a 12 weighted multiple least squares regression model. Predictors included academic, demographic, and economic variables. The study sought to determine what proportion of variance in the representation of students in special education was accounted for by these academic, demographic, and economic variables and whether academic achievement accounted for any significant variance. For the study, “academics” was considered a different variable than “academic achievement.”

The study found that economic and demographic predictors as a group are important because, over time, race has become a proxy for economic status. The economic block and racial block accounted for a significant portion of the variance in the disproportionate identification of African American students, particularly as students with ID and ED. The findings also extended to those being identified as having SLD. For ID, the strongest predictor was economics. For ED, the strongest predictor was demographics. For LD, the strongest predictor was academics. When looking at each of the different racial/ethnic groups, the following blocks of variables were identified as the best predictor for identification for special education: Asian/Pacific Islander was a demographic predictor for all disability categories; Latino and Native American was a demographic predictor for ED and LD; and African American was a demographic identifier that was the main predictor for ED and LD. The conclusion was that academic achievement was a good predictor of referral and identification of students with

disabilities, given that academic achievement is one of the primary reasons for special education referrals (Hosp and Rechly, 2004)

When looking at the literature for the causes of disproportionality, there is variance amongst the reasons and causes. All of the articles presented do list the referral process as one of the causes of disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. The referral process lends itself to being one of the reasons because of the subjective nature of why students are referred to special education. Because there is a gap in the literature as to whether or not the referral process can be considered a separate cause for disproportionality, this study aims at assessing the referral processes and the biases that may exist to support the continued disproportionate representation of minority students in special education.

Bias

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *bias* as "an inclination of temperament or outlook, *especially*: a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment: PREJUDICE" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2019). McNutt (2016) noted that bias is something that we all have and was previously used generations ago as a means of survival. Kahneman (2011) describes two systems in which cognition takes place: System 1 and System 2. System 1 processes information that is outside of the conscious, while System 2 processes information at the conscious level. System 1 is responsible for implicit biases, which are unconscious associations. There are times when one has an implicit bias that does not match that person's outward expressions or beliefs (Staats, 2016).

Since implicit bias occurs within all people, biases exist within the realm of education. Bias in education can occur at any level within the educational system and

includes, but is not limited to, special education referrals, identification of students for special education, special education programming for students, and discipline. Staats notes that concerning discipline, White children frequently receive a different disciplinary consequence that Black children do. She also states that another part of implicit bias relates to seeking information to confirm preexisting ideas about a person, even though there is evidence proving the opposite (Staats, 2016).

Payne et al. (2019) completed a study of the history of implicit bias from different counties throughout the United States based on the proportion of enslaved people who were inhabitants during the time of slavery. They hypothesized that counties that contained a larger number of enslaved people in 1860 would have more of a reason to justify slavery and thus would have higher levels of implicit bias today. This hypothesis was tested using scores from the Implicit Association Test (IAT) along with census data from 1860. The IAT is a measure of implicit bias that utilizes the speed at which a person identifies the races, Black and White, with both positive and negative words. It provides an association strength in which higher scores demonstrate a more positive relationship to “White relative to Black, whereas negative scores reflect more positive associations to Blacks relative to Whites” (Payne et al., 2019, p. 11694).

The results were consistent and showed that White residents in the counties that had larger proportions of enslaved people had a higher rate of negative views toward Blacks. These negative views were shown at both the county and state levels. Although there was more variance in the implicit bias scores, Blacks were more likely than Whites to be negatively viewed in counties and states where there were more enslaved people. Payne et al. offer that the legacy of slavery extends into modern times as there are greater

associations of being pro-White amongst White respondents and being pro-Black amongst Black respondents.

Ysseldyke and Algozzine (1981) completed a study that looked at whether personal characteristics had an impact on student referral to special education. The study included 224 professionals from private and public schools in the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan areas. Each of the participants had participated in at least two different placement teams before entering the study. There were 58 regular education teachers, 79 special education teachers, 30 school psychologists, 31 administrators, and 36 support personnel, which included nurses and social workers. The participants completed a computer-simulated decision-making program. The program was divided into two sections. The first section collected demographic information about the participants and had them complete items related to their knowledge of psychoeducational assessments. After the completion of the first section, participants were given a folder of referral information. The folder contained one of 16 different statements about the child's sex, socioeconomic status, physical attractiveness, and reason for referral. The referral statement contained information regarding the parents' places of employment and a picture that had previously been deemed as either attractive or unattractive. Each participant was randomly assigned one of the 16 different conditions.

Because the actual test scores for the child evaluated in each of the conditions were average, the perceived rating of whether or not the child would be identified as having an ED, a LD, or mental retardation and was based entirely on the referral statement without the benefit of rating scales or objective test scores. The child in the study was more likely to be identified as ED if a behavior problem was identified in the

condition rather than an academic problem. When an academic difficulty was presented in the condition, the child was more likely to be identified as LD rather than MR or ED. The decision to classify the child as ED based solely on a statement in the referral documentation showed that there was some susceptibility to bias when referring students to special education.

Fletcher (2014) explored the impact of implicit bias on multidisciplinary teams (MDT) when they referred African American students. The research questions examined whether implicit bias existed for multidisciplinary team (MDT) members when referring African American students to special education and which characteristics impact the decision-making for referring African American students to special education. Fletcher completed a qualitative investigational study by using a semistructured interview design. An elementary MDT from South Carolina was used in the study. The elementary school itself, which had a 631-student population, was described as not being a Title I school. Of the students, 72% were African American, and 28% were of other ethnicities not otherwise specified. The teaching staff was described as 95% White and 5% African American. Within the study, 62% of the participants were White, and 38% were African American, and each had an average of 10.4 years' experience.

Following the research, Fletcher identified four main themes. The first two themes indicated that the members of the MDT identified academic and behavior issues as the main reasons for referring African American students and that race does not factor in when determining whether or not to refer an African American student to special education. There was one response within this data set that said implicit bias was a factor in the referral process. The third theme continued in line with the first two themes, noting

that academic delays and behavior problems were considered the most salient features in determining whether or not a student should be referred to special education. These traits were seen more often than attention issues, social gaps, or delays due to the transient nature of students. The fourth theme from the study was that most of the MDT members identified a lack of stimulation and motivation toward education amongst African American parents. The MDT members concluded that this lack of motivation and stimulation for education has contributed to the disproportionality of African American students in special education. Fletcher discussed how the participants in the study appeared to use stereotypes for the behavior of the parents' lack of motivation rather than looking at any unique experiences that the families may have undergone.

Gottlieb et al. (1991) completed a study that examined the differences between referrals to special education from parents and students. Within the study, they looked at differences in parent referrals between different races to see if there was a difference in their reasons for referrals or the referral patterns. The study looked at 439 student records that met the criteria of having sufficient information regarding the reason for referral, the completed evaluation, and the referral source. Of those referrals, 75% were made from teachers, and 25% were made from parents. The racial makeup of the school population was as follows: 23% White, 37% African American, 35% Hispanic, and 5% Asian.

The study found that White parents were 97% more likely to refer their children than Hispanic parents were to refer theirs and 100% more likely than African American parents. The data also showed that based on the proportions of teacher referrals, 15.5% were White, 42.4% were African American, and 42.1% were Hispanic. When the teacher

referrals data were analyzed, they showed that teachers had a 96% chance of referring fewer White than African American or Hispanic students.

Another study completed by Podell and Soodak (1993) examined whether or not bias exists within the referral process for special education based on teacher efficacy. Study participants were 240 regular-education teachers who had at least one year of experience and taught in a New York school. Of the participants, 200 were women, and 40 were men. Overall, 200 were White, 14 were African American, seven were Hispanic, two were Asian, and 17 were of another ethnicity or did not specify their ethnicity. Each of the participants was given a case study to read regarding a third-grade male student. Each variant of the case study presented the same information, except the etiology of the student's academic issues and the socioeconomic (SES) factors of the student's profile. Gibson and Dembo's (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale was used to assess teacher efficacy.

Podell and Soodak found in this study that the teachers did not solely rely on academic and behavioral information in their referral of students to special education. They concluded teachers had biases that were present when referring students to special education because they considered variables that were unrelated to academic difficulties (e.g., SES). Teachers with low self-efficacy were more likely to refer a student from a low SES background than a teacher with a high self-efficacy. There was no difference between teacher efficacy and referrals for students who were from a high SES. Teachers were also more likely to refer students who had an unexplained etiology for their learning problems than those whose learning problems were blamed on medical or environmental factors.

Bolden (2009) completed a study that sought to answer whether racial bias impacts teachers in their decision-making for special education referrals, and if so, whether those biases are specifically toward African American male students. The 62 participants in the study came from local schools in the Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, and Mansfield, Ohio, areas. Each was asked to read one of six variations of a vignette regarding a student and then answer several questions. The vignettes contained demographic information for the student, including race, gender, age, and grade, as well as anecdotal information from a teacher, standardized test scores, and behavior information. The data were summarized. Respondents were asked to use the data to determine the likelihood that any of the data presented would result in a special education referral.

The first research question was, “Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services based upon student race and/or gender” (Bolden, 2009, p. 92). According to the study, there was not a significant difference between the referral data based on race and/or gender. The second question was related to whether or not teachers were biased in making referrals for Black males. There was also no significant difference in the referral of Black male students. Many of the findings of the study were inconclusive. One of the reasons given for the data being inconclusive was the sample size. The researcher needed to have a sample size of at least 162 participants and fell short at 62, thus making the data hard to interpret. Since the questions were not able to be answered, further evaluation and study are needed.

Disproportionate representation of minority students has been a trend over the last few decades. Currently, several federal laws have been enacted to combat the

disproportionality seen regarding minority students through the referral and identification processes that lead to special education. Both IDEA and ESSA demonstrate the goals of the legislative branch to ensure that minority students receive the same access to education. To that end, the laws provide a structure for reporting disproportionality relating to identifying students for special education, the types of special education programs they receive, and the discipline they receive.

Several studies have pointed to some of the reasons disproportionality exists. While a consensus has not been reached, poverty and access to resources are two culprits that may help to explain the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. Another potentially significant factor examined in the literature is that of bias. Biases appear throughout the referral process and can lead teams of professionals to refer students based on race or ethnicity, without considering the whole child. Studies show that there are instances in which the data are not examined fully. Instead, biases are used in the decision-making process. This bias leads to more minority students being referred to and served in special education. There are several research studies showing that school staff may demonstrate bias during the referral process. The biases that exist are typically implicit bias, and school staff is reticent to acknowledge the fact that these biases exist. Whether or not people are willing to acknowledge the biases does not eliminate the impact that bias has during the referral process.

Summary

The current study served to continue the research into which factors influence teachers as they make decisions for referring students to special education. The study will specifically look at how race impacts the rate of referral amongst teachers and whether or

not teacher bias impacts their likelihood to refer students to special education. The study will also examine various teacher factors, such as the race of teacher and years of experience, and how those factors might impact decision-making for referrals.

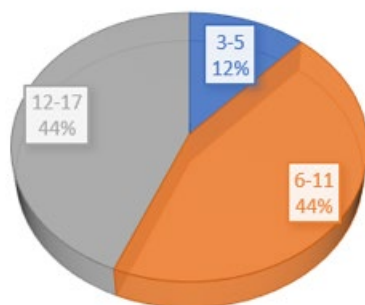
Chapter 3

Methods

Teachers, administrators, and parents can refer students for a special education evaluation. General education teachers play a pivotal role in the referral process since the majority of student work completed happens in the general education setting. According to the 2017–2018 data from the U.S. Department of Education, the percentage of students who are served in special education is equal for students who are 12–17 and students who are 6–11, as indicated in Figure 1. The focus on the referral process from elementary teachers will be a larger base of teachers who engage in the referral process. The problem of practice is the overidentification of minority students for referral and their overrepresentation in special education programs. The focus of the research was on bias within the referral process. Studies indicate that there is possible bias within the referral process, which leads to the overidentification of minority students in special education, (Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1981). This disproportionate representation has been studied as early as 1968. Both ESSA and IDEA address the national concerns under which minority students are represented in special education.

Figure 1

Age Range of Students in Special Education



Research Questions

The research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What student-level information (e.g., behavior, grades, standardized test scores) do teachers report as the most important for determining referral for special education, and does this differ based on teacher demographics?
2. Are there differences in the referral information emphasized by teachers based on the race/ethnicity of the student in the scenarios?
3. Are there differences in ratings of recommendation for referral to special education based on race/ethnicity of the student?
4. Are there differences in ratings of the likelihood to refer students for a special education evaluation based on teacher race/ethnicity or experience?

Research Design

The quantitative study was designed to measure the impact of potential bias on special education evaluation referrals. The study used both descriptive and experimental methods to derive the potential impact that bias has on the special education evaluation referral process. The study specifically looked at decision making during the referral process for teachers ranging from kindergarten through fifth grade and whether referral decisions may be influenced by student race/ethnicity and/or characteristics of teachers.

Sample/Participants

The target population was elementary school teachers in two midsize suburban school districts in the Houston metro area, herein titled Local ISD and Metro ISD. Local ISD provided approval for the study to be conducted within the school district. Metro

ISD did not allow the study to be completed within the ISD. Metro ISD cited the COVID-19 school closure as the reason for not allowing outside research to take place.

Within Local ISD, 38% of the teachers are African American, 20% are Hispanic, 37% are White, and the other 5% identify as being Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, or of two or more races. The teachers from Local ISD, which has 26 elementary schools with an average of 20 teachers per school, represented a convenience sample.

Nine hundred thirty-five potential participants were contacted on March 25, 2020, via an email that was sent to all elementary teachers in the district, notifying them of the research. The email contained information regarding the research proposal and purpose, as well as a link to the survey asking for their participation. Reminder emails were sent on April 1, 23, and 30, 2020. During a professional learning community meeting, a reminder was given to teachers to complete the survey. Teachers were also reminded during special education meetings.

All teachers from grades kindergarten through fifth grade were eligible to take part in the study; 109 teachers completed the survey, representing a response rate of 12%. Table 1 shows the demographic data of the teachers who participated in the study. Teachers with 10 or more years of experience made up the majority of the respondents (65%). General education teachers accounted for about half of the participants (49%), teachers with special education experience only had the least amount of representation (20%), and teachers with experience in both areas fell in the middle (31%).

Table 1*Teacher Demographic Data*

Descriptor	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Race/ethnicity		
African American	38	35%
Hispanic	22	20%
White	44	40%
Not reported	5	5%
Years of teaching experience		
1–3	10	9%
4–6	18	17%
7–9	10	9%
10 or more	71	65%
Type of teaching experience		
General education	53	48%
Special education	22	20%
Both general and special education	34	31%
Total participants	109	

Measures

The primary measures utilized in this study were scenarios presenting information regarding a hypothetical student, including race/ethnicity, as well as academic and behavioral information. The scenarios used in the study were adapted from Bolden (2009). There were two types of scenarios developed. The first scenario was an average student that would not typically need a referral for a special education evaluation. The second scenario was of a student who would need to be referred for evaluation to determine eligibility for special education. For each type of scenario, the student's race was identified as African American, White, or Hispanic. Content validity measures

determined the instrument to be valid based on previous research studies (Bolden, 2009). Reliability was calculated using a focus group to determine interrater reliability for both the scenarios in terms of whether or not the students should be referred to special education.

The scenarios, while adopted from Bolden, were different in their presentation. Each scenario contained a graph of the student's test scores and grades. There was also a brief description of the student's disciplinary record and behavior. The student's response to general intervention was briefly included as a part of the teacher's anecdotal information provided for the scenario.

Questions were presented to the teachers after they read the scenarios to determine if a special education referral would be submitted. The questions were designed to determine how likely the teacher would be to recommend a special education referral based on academic information, behavioral data, standardized test scores, anecdotal data, or overall data. The only difference in the description of the student across the two types of scenarios (refer, not refer) was race/ethnicity. This allowed the study to examine potential differences in referral decisions based on the race/ethnicity of the student. Because gender can be another factor of bias, the gender of the student in the scenario was omitted.

The Likert scale designations were collected and compiled along with the demographic data of the participants. Data were arranged to show the number of participants by demographics, along with their corresponding answers. The proportions of the students referred for special education were calculated to determine if a higher percentage of teachers would refer the minority students but not white students.

Data Collection/Procedures

Scenario and Question Development

The scenarios and questions used in this study were adapted from questions and vignettes developed by Bolden (2009). The information presented in these vignettes used data from Ohio state assessments. For this study, scoring was changed to reflect scores from the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam. Also, the original vignettes used names and gender as identifiers in the study. These identifying characteristics were removed from the study. The information provided in the scenarios was also changed to describe two different types of students. One scenario describes a student who should be referred to special education evaluation. The second scenario describes a student who should not be referred to special education evaluation.

Focus Group to Review Scenarios and Questions

Focus Group Review of Scenarios and Questions

After adapting the scenarios, a focus group was convened to review the information within the scenarios. The focus group consisted of six professionals who reviewed the folders and assess students for special education evaluations—all six of the members of the group currently practice as licensed specialists in school psychology (LSSPs) or certified diagnosticians in Texas. Of the group, five are LSSPs. Three of the group members hold teaching certificates and have taught both general and special education students.

The group reviewed the information in the scenarios to determine if the information presented would lead a person to submit a referral for special education evaluation or not. This was meant to ensure content validity. The first goal was to have

one scenario in which all of the members of the focus group would submit a referral and one scenario in which all of the members of the focus group would not submit a referral. The second goal was to have the focus group review the information in the questions to follow the scenarios to ensure the questions were logical and easy to answer. After reviewing the scenarios, the focus group returned information to the researcher, indicating how they would answer the questions.

Revision of Scenarios and Questions

After the review of the scenarios by the focus group, the narratives were adjusted to include suggested information from the focus group. Among the group, there was 100% agreement in which of the students would be referred as opposed to which students would not be referred to special education evaluation. All members of the group indicated that the overall profile was the most compelling evidence that would lead them to the referral for special education evaluation. The information from the group demonstrated appropriate interrater reliability. The group suggested making some changes to the data, which would make it easier to identify the differences between the two scenarios. The scenarios were also reviewed with one of the thesis committee members. Based on the reviews, scenarios were revised to include a deeper division with grades for the two scenarios. Also, the language was adjusted for the STAAR scores to use the most current language that identifies how a student performs on the measure. The scenarios were then finalized; there were a total of six final scenarios. The first three scenarios were the scenario in which the student should not be referred. The only difference between the scenarios was the race/ethnicity of the student identified (i.e., African American, Hispanic, White). The second group of scenarios is for the student who should be referred

to special education evaluation, with the race of the student changing between the scenarios. Again, the race of the students was identified as African American, Hispanic, or White.

Scenario Distribution

Participants received an email from Qualtrics with a message about the study and a link. Once participants clicked the link, they went to a page that further described the study as well as noted their consent for participation in the study. Qualtrics then randomly assigned the participants to a scenario. The participants read a researcher-adapted scenario and answered six questions regarding their recommendation for referral to special education evaluation based on the scenario (Bolden, 2009). After reading the scenario, teachers responded to questions related to how likely they were to refer the student to special education evaluation based on standardized test scores, academic performance, conduct, observational data, or the overall profile presented. The teachers rated their responses on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from “Would Not Refer/Extremely Unlikely” to “Would Refer/Extremely Likely.”

The information in Table 2 indicates how many scenarios were answered and which category they fell in along with the identified race and ethnicity of the student in the scenario. This information is helpful when considering the frequency of the data presented in the results.

Data Collection

The study specifically looked at the impact bias may have on the referral process for teachers of kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. The survey collected the

Table 2*Completion of Scenario Types*

Type of scenario: refer/not refer	Race/ethnicity of student in scenario	Number of scenarios completed
Refer	African American	20
Refer	Hispanic	19
Refer	White	18
Do not refer	African American	16
Do not refer	Hispanic	18
Do not refer	White	18
Total Completed		109

following demographic information from the teachers: race, years of teaching, and the type of teaching experience (general education, special education, or both). This demographic information was used to group teachers and determine if there was a potential bias amongst the different teacher groups when it came to referring students to special education evaluation and types of information emphasized by teachers for decision-making.

The data from the questions answered were collected electronically. Once all data were collected, they were analyzed to answer the research questions. More specifically, the study aimed to determine if differences existed in referral decisions for minority students (African American, Hispanic) in comparison to white students. Further, the study sought to determine if race and/or experience of teachers impacted teacher referrals.

Data Analysis

In analysis of the data for Research Question 1, frequency data was used to determine which pieces of student-level data were most important for determining if a

student was referred to special education evaluation. A series of ANOVAs were also run to see if there were any significant differences in the information used by teachers to refer students based on the race/ethnicity of the teacher. For research question two, frequency data was again used to determine if there were differences in the referral information emphasized by the teachers based on the race/ethnicity of the students. A Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA was used to analyze the data for Research Questions 3 and 4, which considered differences in ratings of recommendations and differences in teacher demographics and the likelihood of referral of a student to special education evaluation.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine whether there was potential bias based on race/ethnicity in the process of making referrals for special education evaluations. There were 109 teachers who responded to the research study survey. Data collected included teacher demographic data and answers to questions about one of six randomly presented scenarios (see Appendix) that provided student data and other information. Teachers had to determine whether to refer a student for a special education evaluation, and frequency data were used to show which information teachers found most important. ANOVAs were run to determine if there were significant differences between the data emphasized by teachers to refer students for special education evaluation based on the race/ethnicity of the teacher. Frequency data were also used to show the differences in referral information used. A Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA was used to determine differences in data emphasized by teachers during the referral process.

Research Question

Once again, the research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What student-level information (e.g., behavior, grades, standardized test scores) do teachers report as the most important for determining referral for special education, and does this differ based on teacher demographics?
2. Are there differences in the referral information emphasized by teachers based on the race/ethnicity of the student in the scenarios?
3. Are there differences in ratings of recommendation for referral to special education based on race/ethnicity of the student?

4. Are there differences in ratings of the likelihood to refer students for a special education evaluation based on teacher race/ethnicity or experience?

Report of Findings

Two different scenario types were distributed to teachers, one in which a referral was not indicated by the data/information (do not refer) and another in which a referral would be deemed necessary (do refer), according to the focus group convened before distribution of the scenarios. (For an explanation of the preparation of the six scenarios and the six-member focus group that evaluated and revised them, see Chapter 3.) For the do-not-refer scenarios, there were 52 potential respondents but only 51 answered the question regarding making a referral for an evaluation. Of these 51 respondents, 31 indicated they would be “extremely unlikely” and 14 indicated they would be “unlikely” to refer for an evaluation, indicating 86.5% of respondents agreed with the panel. This amounts to a rough estimate of “accuracy.” When looking at the do-refer scenarios, 56 of 57 responded to the question regarding making a referral for special education evaluation. Of those, 11 indicated they were “extremely likely” and 14 indicated they were “likely” to refer; thus, 43.9% agreed with the focus group to make a referral (i.e., 25/56 indicated a referral was necessary).

In the scenarios testing on race and/or ethnicity of the target student (Table 3), within the do-not-refer scenarios, agreement was generally high. Agreeing with the focus group (teachers who indicated they were “extremely unlikely” or “somewhat unlikely” to refer) on the African American student scenario were 87.5% of respondents, agreeing on the Hispanic scenario were 94.5%, and agreeing on the White student scenario were 82.3%. Within the do-refer scenarios, there was a 40% agreement with the focus group

on the African American scenario, 42.1% agreement on the Hispanic scenario, and 50% agreement on the White scenario, reflecting teachers who indicated they were “extremely likely” or “likely” to refer for a special education evaluation.

Table 3

Agreement with Focus Group for Referrals

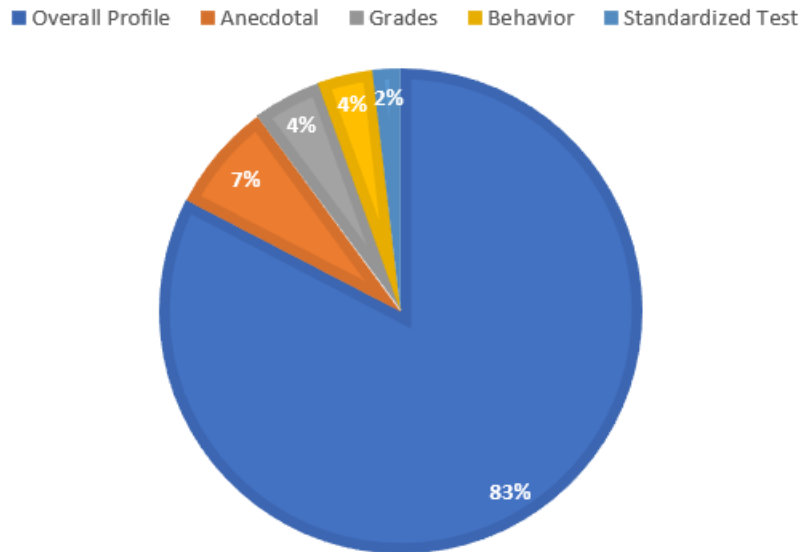
Scenario type	Percentage of agreement with focus group for referrals
Do not refer Overall	86.5
African American	87.5
Hispanic	94.5
White	82.3
Do refer overall	43.9
African American	40.0
Hispanic	42.1
White	50.0

Research Question 1

Teachers were asked to identify which information they found most important, based on their own experiences and practice, for determining whether to refer a student for a special education evaluation. Given the nature of the question, frequency data across all respondents (i.e., all six scenarios) were used to determine which source of data teachers found to be most important. Overwhelmingly, 82.6% of teachers indicated that the most important data source was the overall profile. Anecdotal information was identified by 7.3% of teachers, followed by grades (4.6%), behavior (3.7%), and standardized test information (1.8%), as indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Referral Data Identified by Teachers as Most Important



Teacher Race/Ethnicity and Experience as Variables

Table 4 provides respondents' information source preferences by teacher race/ethnicity and by teachers' years of experience. Overall, 81.6% of African American teachers, 72.7% of Hispanic teachers, and 90.9% of White teachers indicated that they based their decision on the overall student profile. Student behavior, grades, or anecdotal information were each indicated by 5.3% of African American respondents, of whom only 2.6% identified standardized test scores as the most compelling information in referral decision making. For the Hispanic teachers, 9.1% identified grades, 9.1% anecdotal information, and 4.5% behavior or standardized test scores in addition to the overall profile. Finally, for the White teachers, 4.5% identified anecdotal information,

2.3% identified behavior, and 2.3% identified grades. None identified standardized test scores as the most compelling information in the referral decision process.

The data were also examined based on the number of years of teaching reported. None of the study participants indicated having zero to one year of teaching. For those teachers with 1 to 3 years of experience, the overall profile was the most frequently used information at 50%, while 20% reported anecdotal information was most important and 30% indicated standardized test scores were. None of these teachers indicated they would consider behavior or grades as the most compelling information to determine if a student needed a special education evaluation referral. For those who had 4 to 6 years of teaching experience, the frequency data showed that 77.8% considered the overall profile to be most compelling, 16.7% considered behavior most important, and 5.6% considered grades most important. Among this group, none indicated they would consider anecdotal or standardized test scores to be the most useful information in considering referring a student to special education.

For the group of teachers who had 7 to 9 years of experience, the data showed 90.0% considered the overall student profile as most important and 10% relied on anecdotal data as most important. None of the respondents in this group indicated they would use grades, behavior, or standardized test scores as the most compelling data for a referral to special education evaluation. For the group of teachers who had 10 years or more experience, 87.3% indicated that the overall student profile would be the information they found most useful in determining whether or not a student should be referred for special education evaluation, while 5.6% indicated grades, 5.6% indicated anecdotal information, and 1.4% reported behavior as most important; none of the

teachers in this group considered standardized test scores as most compelling for making decisions regarding referring students for a special education evaluation.

After teachers reviewed the data/information provided in scenarios, several questions asked the respondents to rate how likely they were to recommend the student for a referral based on the following: academic performance, behavior, standardized test scores, and teacher

Table 4

Data Emphasized by Teachers to Make Referral Decisions Based on Race/Ethnicity and Experience

Teacher Demographics	Behavior	Grades	Anecdotal	Standardized tests	Overall profile
Race/ethnicity					
African American ($n = 38$)	5.3%	5.3%	5.3%	2.6%	81.6%
Hispanic ($n = 22$)	4.5%	9.1%	9.1%	4.5%	72.7%
White ($n = 44$)	2.3%	2.3%	4.5%	0	90.9%
Missing ($n = 5$)	0	0	40.0%	0	60.0%
Teaching experience					
1–3	0	0	20.0%	30.0%	50.0%
4–6	16.7%	5.6%	0	0	77.8%
7–9	0	0	10.0%	0	90.0%
10+	1.4%	5.6%	5.6%	0	87.3%

anecdotal information. A series of ANOVAs were completed to compare the means between groups based on the race/ethnicity of the teacher and determine if there was a statistical difference between the referral rates based on the different types of information provided in the scenarios when a referral was warranted. The ANOVAs were only run for the students in the do-refer scenario. This is because 86.5% of study participants, in conformance with the focus group, identified students in the do-not-refer scenarios as not needing a referral. The ANOVAs were also only run for the race/ethnicity of the teachers

and not the years of experience due to the disproportionate sample size of that demographic. The ANOVA looked at the difference between the race/ethnicity of the teachers and how they rated all of the students who should have been referred. Regarding academic performance data provided, the results of the ANOVA showed no significant difference between groups ($p = .30$), behavior ($p = .37$), or standardized test scores ($p = .73$). Finally, for the teacher anecdotal information provided, there were no significant differences indicated among groups ($p = .41$).

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 examined whether the types of information emphasized by teachers might vary based on the race of students presented in scenarios. This was analyzed using the survey question in which teachers identified the most compelling information for making a referral in light of the scenario presented. Data were analyzed across the six different scenarios as shown in Table 5. For African American students in the scenario in which a referral was considered necessary, 20% of respondents indicated they would not refer. In terms of specific information provided, the overall profile (30%) was considered to be the most compelling information. For African American students in scenarios in which referral was identified as unwarranted by the focus group, 62.5% of study participants agreed, with 25% of respondents indicating they would not refer based on anecdotal information. For Hispanic students for whom a referral would have been warranted according to the focus group, 36.8% of the participants disagreed, indicating they would not refer the student, with 31.6% indicating that the overall profile was the most compelling information. In the scenario involving a Hispanic student for whom a referral was not warranted, 77.8% of the respondents indicated they would not refer the

student, with 16.7% indicating that behavior would be the information they would use to determine that a referral to special education evaluation should be initiated. For the White student who would require a referral, 17.6% of respondents indicated they would not refer, citing the overall profile (52.9%) as the most compelling data, followed by behavior (17.6%). For the White student who should not be referred, just over one third of respondents indicated they would not refer (35.3%), with 29.4% identifying the overall profile as the most compelling information.

Table 5

Data Used to Refer Students Based on Student Race/Ethnicity for Refer and Do Not Refer Scenarios

Race/Ethnicity by	Behavior	Grades	Anecdotal	Standardized test scores	Overall profile	Would not refer
Do refer						
African American	15.0%	15.0%	15.0%	5.0%	30.0%	20.0%
Hispanic	10.5%	0	21.1%	0	31.6%	36.8%
White	17.6%	0	11.8%	0	52.9%	17.6%
Do not refer						
African American	0	0	25%	12.5%	0	62.5%
Hispanic	16.7%	0	5.6%	0	0	77.8%
White	22.2%	5.6%	0	5.6%	29.4%	35.3%

Note. One person did not respond to the question for both the White do-refer and do-not-refer scenarios.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was analyzed using data from the following survey question, “Based on all of the information presented, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?” A Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA test was

performed. When comparing all scenarios there was No statistical significance differences were found in respondent's ratings of likelihood to refer based on student race/ethnicity across all scenarios ($n = 108$; $H(2) = 2.50$; $p = .286$).

The Kruskal-Wallis test was also performed on the do-refer and the do-not-refer scenarios independently based on student race/ethnicity. The results for the comparison for the do-refer scenario ($n = 57$; $H(2) = 2.173$; $p = .337$) indicates that there was not a statistically significant difference in the referral rates based on the race of the students for scenarios in which referral was the suggested choice. Likewise, for the do-not-refer scenario ($n = 51$), results showed no statistical significance in the difference in the rates of referral across groups ($H(2) = 3.175$; $p = .204$).

Since there was no statistical significance for comparisons based on student race/ethnicity in scenarios, frequency data were also calculated to see the frequencies in referral rates for the students based on the scenario type and the race/ethnicity of the student. Table 6 displays the frequency data for referrals based on the student's race/ethnicity.

Table 6

Frequency Data of Likelihood of Referral Based on Student Race/Ethnicity and Scenario Type

Scenario type race/ethnicity	Extremely unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	neutral	Somewhat likely	Extremely likely
Do not refer					
African American	50.0%	37.5%	6.3%	6.3%	0
Hispanic	77.8%	16.7%	0	5.6%	0
White	52.9%	29.4%	11.8%	5.9%	0
Do refer					
African American	20.0%	40.0%	0	35.0%	5.0%
Hispanic	26.3%	31.6%	0	26.3%	15.8%
White	16.7%	27.8%	5.6%	11.1%	38.9%

Note. One person did not answer question for the White do-not-refer scenario.

Research Question 4

The data used to answer this research question again came from the survey question, “Based on all of the information presented, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?” Teacher demographics were used in the Kruskal-Wallis test to determine if there were any statistically significant differences in how teachers recommended referrals to special education. When the demographic of teacher race/ethnicity was used, the results ($n = 00$; $H(2) = 1.945$; $p = .378$) demonstrated no statistical significance in how teachers of different races (African American, Hispanic, White) referred the students to special education. Likewise, the results ($n = 00$; $H(3) = 1.821$; $p = .610$) indicated there was no statically significant difference in how teachers with varying years of experience made their special education referral decision in this study.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The overidentification of minority students in special education is a systematic issue that has plagued special education since its inception. Dunn (1968) discussed issues related to overidentifying African American students with disabilities, and this research predates the first laws related to special education. Throughout the years, this issue has continued as laws have been rewritten. This study aimed to discover whether or not there was bias within the referral process that leads students to special education.

The following research questions were examined:

1. What student-level information (e.g., behavior, grades, standardized test scores) do teachers report as the most important for determining referral for special education, and does this differ based on teacher demographics?
2. Are there differences in the referral information emphasized by teachers based on the race/ethnicity of the student in the scenarios?
3. Are there differences in ratings of recommendation for referral to special education based on race/ethnicity of the student?
4. Are there differences in ratings of the likelihood to refer students for a special education evaluation based on teacher race/ethnicity or experience?

Summary of Findings

In general, the data collected via the surveys in this study indicated that the teachers who participated did not agree with the focus group in determining when a referral to special education was necessary for a child. While respondents agreed with the focus group more often for the do-not-refer scenarios than those for the do-refer

scenarios, they appeared to struggle with determining an appropriate referral for special education. Teachers appeared to have a better indication when a student did not need to be referred to special education evaluation than they did when a student required a referral. The rates indicating agreement suggest that more than 50% of the students who might have a disability would go without a referral to special education. It should also be noted that for the do-not-refer scenario, it was only the scenario featuring an African American student in which a teacher responded being “extremely likely” to refer this student to special education.

A total of 109 teachers, including teachers with experience in general education, special education, or both, participated in this study. The results of the study indicate that there was no statistically significant difference between teachers’ decisions regarding referral for special education based on student race/ethnicity as well as teacher race/ethnicity and experience. Since there was not a statistically significant difference, the null hypothesis was maintained. This study, like the ones completed by Bolden (2009) and others (Fletcher, 2014; Morgan et al., 2015), did not find conclusive data to support the hypothesis that there is bias within the referral process for special education, in particular, related to race/ethnicity.

According to the information collected in the study, most teachers indicated they relied on the overall profile as their method for determining whether or not a student should be referred to special education. There was an exception for teachers who had 1 and 3 years of experience. For this group of teachers, 50% said they would rely on the overall profile, while 20% indicated anecdotal information and 30% indicated standardized test scores. It should be noted that 10 teachers fell in this category. Across

race and ethnicity, there was very little difference about which information teachers would use to refer a student within their practice.

There was no statistical difference between the race/ethnicity of the teachers and how they viewed the need for a referral for the students. Likewise, there was no statistical difference between which students were recommended for a referral and those who were not.

Agreement with Focus Group in Decision Making

There were some concerns regarding agreement with the panel's decision-making process for both when a referral was warranted and when one was not. According to the data, the biggest issue arose when a referral was warranted. For students who should have been referred, the 43.9% rate of agreement shows that most students who might have a disability (or at the very least, were suspected of having a disability) would not be referred to special education. The research into how accurate teachers are in making referrals to special education is inconclusive. Gresham et al. (1987) found teachers were very accurate in determining when students had a specific learning disability. However, Fuchs and Fuchs (1987) completed a study in which teachers reported there were behavior improvements in students receiving interventions, even though the observational data completed by the experts did not show behavior improvements. VanDerHeyden et al. (2003) found that only 19% of the students that teachers identified as needing a referral were found to have a learning problem once those students were given a criterion-referenced assessment.

There is a “child find” mandate in Section 300.11 of IDEA (2004)0000). This mandate states that districts must identify, locate, and evaluate any student who has or is

suspected of having a disability. This also has implications of denying special education services to students who would need them. There has been a problem in Texas as it relates to some of these mandates. The state has had an unwritten rule that punished school districts for having more than 8% of their student population identified as having a disability. School districts have been trying to rectify this for a few years now. This is one hypothesis to explain why there might be hesitancy in making referrals for students who might need them.

The rate at which study participants agreed with the focus group about students who should not be referred to special education was 86.5%. This rate is higher than for those students who should be referred but is still troubling. The rate suggests that about 15% of the students who are referred to special education in the district do not need to go through the evaluation process. The evaluation process is lengthy. With the current Corrective Action Plan (CAP) for the Texas Education Agency (TEA), assessment staff resources are limited. If the assessment staff is being pulled to evaluate students who do not need an evaluation, that impacts the district as well as the referrals for students who would benefit from special education services. Referring students who do not need a referral might also lead to students being identified, receiving services, and being inappropriately placed in special education. One of the negative impacts of labeling students with a disability is they can develop diminished self-esteem (Thomson, 2012). Further, Kirby (2016) found that students in special education have a diminished graduation rate, live under the stigma of having a disability, and are not afforded the same access to the general education curriculum as their peers. This would describe the impact of placing students in special education who may not need services.

Research Question 1 and Research Question 2

There were no statistical differences between the race of the teacher and the information they would use to determine whether a student needed a special education referral. All races of teachers, African American, Hispanic, and White, had a majority who indicated they would use the overall profile to make their determination for a special education referral, 81.6%, 72.7%, and 90.9% respectively. The second highest rated type of information for all races was anecdotal. Anecdotal information is provided by the teacher on how the teacher sees the child performing both academically and behaviorally. Anecdotal information is subjective because it is typically narrative. Anecdotal information was considered most important to a referral for the do-not-refer scenario with an African American student. Using anecdotal information for this scenario could indicate there is some bias within the process since the student, according to the focus group, should not have been recommended for a referral.

In their general practice, most teachers indicated they rely on the overall profile for deciding as to when a referral to special education is warranted (87%). The data in the study show that when presented with a scenario, teachers use other data as their primary reason for deciding on a referral to special education.

When considering the information presented in research question two, the largest percentage (52.9%) shown to use the overall profile happened for the White referral scenario. The other two referral scenarios, African American and Hispanic, showed a much smaller percentage, 30% and 31.6% respectively, of respondents used the overall profile in their main source of data that they used in their determination that a special education referral was warranted. For African American students specifically, 50% of

respondents reported they would use other individual characteristics to make their determination. These types of responses were consistent across the race/ethnicity of the student in the scenarios. When teachers focus on the individual characteristics of a student rather than the whole student profile, this can lead to bias within the process.

The use of individual characteristics as the biggest determinant for making a special education was utilized by some of the teachers in the study. Ysseldyke and Algozzine (1981) found that personal characteristics were used in determining whether a student would be referred to special education by individual teachers. The data in the current study shows several teachers engage in this practice. The problem is teachers appear to identify themselves as using the overall profile in their practice, but in their actual practice (referring in this study) they do not always use the overall profile. This inconsistency suggests teachers know and understand which data should be most important when considering special education even though it did not a part of their standard practice for making referrals with the scenarios. The design of this study does not look at why or how often a teacher indicated they would use the overall profile but instead chose a specific characteristic of the student to make their referral determination.

Fletcher (2014) found that for African American students, teachers mostly used academic and behavioral data in considering a special education referral. The data in this study do not wholly support Fletcher's findings. The factor that stands out the most in this study was that teachers with less experience appear to be the teachers who used something other than the overall profile to determine if a special education referral was warranted. Further examination of the data used to refer students based on the student's race/ethnicity shows a different picture. White students in both the do-refer and do-not-

refer scenarios had the highest percentage of teachers who responded behavior was the main reason for the referral. For the scenario in which an African American student was identified by the focus group as needing referral, behavior, grades, and anecdotal information received the same percentage of identification (15% each) as the most compelling information in decision-making.

Research Question 3 and Research Question 4

Research Question 3 and Research Question 4 looked at the statistical difference between referrals based on characteristics. In the do-not-refer scenarios, participants had the lowest rate of correspondence to the focus group panel (82.3%) for the White student, with correspondence rising for the scenario with the African American student (87.5%) and the Hispanic student (94.5%). For this group of scenarios, only the scenario with an African American student had one “Extremely Likely” for behavior and teacher anecdotal information, although the referral, according to the panel, was not necessary; however, this represented one respondent.

As for the do-refer scenarios, the one with the White student had the highest rate of referrals (50.0%), followed by the one featuring a Hispanic student (42.1%), and finally the one featuring an African American student (40.0%). The results suggest that teachers were more likely to refer a White student than an African American or Hispanic student when a referral was warranted, as indicated by the panel. Based on this information, it could be perceived that teachers have a more accurate perception of White students and their needs than they do of those of African American and Hispanic students.

The data in the study reflect what was found in Morgan et al. (2015), who showed that White students were more likely to be referred to special education than their minority counterparts. Although not statistically significant, the data in this study are more closely aligned to those findings of Morgan et al. than with those of others who found that minority students were more likely to be referred to special education than were White students (Gottlieb et al., 1991; Hosp and Reschly, 2003; Zhang et al., 2012). Local ISD has had issues with significant disproportionality as outlined by the TEA for the past three years. As a result, the district has had to provide a Strategic Support Plan to TEA to remedy the significant disproportionality. This could be one of the reasons that the teachers were hesitant to refer the minority students and were more apt to refer the White student in the scenario.

The study finds that there were no significant differences in the likelihood to refer a student based on the race/ethnicity of the teacher or the years of teaching experience. One possible reason for this is the sample size. With the majority of teachers having more experience, they could have viewed the students as not needing a special education referral, but interventions in the classroom. Another hypothesis to explain the lack of statistical difference is that the teachers work in an urban school district and have many years of experience. In their experience of working with these students, they have been able to overcome their implicit biases and understand that other factors could cause poor grades beyond a student having a disability. They quite possibly could also relate the scenarios to the students in their school district and frame the information in a subjective way, rather than objectively reading the scenarios and understanding the children from an objective viewpoint. The teachers working with children of similar socioeconomic status

might have skewed the data. Teachers have conversations regarding the student's socioeconomic status when looking at academic issues more when the school resides in a poverty area than when not.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the study is the number of participants. While garnering at least a 20% response rate from teachers in the district was anticipated, the final sample was 12% of possible respondents. The main issue leading to the lack of participation was likely the COVID-19 school closure. Because of COVID-19, schools closed on March 13, 2020, and have not resumed normal operations as of this writing. During this time, many teachers were thrown into a new world of teaching for which they were not prepared. As a result, the number of teachers willing to participate in the study may have been impacted. Also, because teachers were not coming into the school building, other personal reminders and connections were not made, which might have also impacted the sample size. Given a larger sample size, with more respondents for each scenario, there might have been newer teachers who might have had a difference in ratings.

The 109 respondents in the study were reflective of the race/ethnicity of the teaching staff of the district but were not reflective of the overall profile of years of teaching for the district as indicated by the Texas Academic Performance Report (2018–2019). The district profile has 42.8% of teachers in the beginning year and 1–5 years, but the study does not come close to that level of presentation. The district also has 28.7% of its teachers with over 10 years of experience, but this study has 70.6%.

Along those lines, the study was also completed in one school district. A second school district declined to allow outside research during the COVID-19 school

closures. The demographics of the students and staff would have been different from those in Local ISD. These differences in demographics would have made for a richer sample size and inevitably provided additional data to compare.

Another limitation presented in the study was the information provided in scenarios. Several study participants reached out to the researcher to inquire about the students in the scenarios. Participants indicated that more data was needed to make a good determination as to whether special education was needed. Several participants indicated that the data should have specifically reflected if the student participated in a Response to Intervention process and that the results of the process should have been listed. One participant said she would have liked to have seen the results of a vision and hearing screening to rule out the impact of needing glasses. Other participants reached out and said they thought more anecdotal information was needed to better explain the child. There were pieces of data left out of the scenarios that might have made it easier for participants to respond to the questions. It should be noted that within Local ISD, the teachers are typically not responsible for making a referral to special education. There is a Student Support Specialist on each campus who initiates the referrals and takes the information to a folder review committee. The lack of personal involvement in the RTI Process and referral process, could have also impacted the teachers' abilities to make accurate referral decisions.

Future Research

Future research should look at the Response to Intervention Process and incorporate data from the process in the scenarios. Having more data in the scenarios related to the student's intervention might enhance the study and give teachers a better

understanding of the student and the overall progress of the student. In IDEA (2004, specifically Title 20 of Section 1414, subsection b(6), the statute states that eligibility for a suspected disability must include data showing the use of scientifically based interventions given to the student. If more data was provided on scientifically based interventions, it might have given teachers a better understanding of the student's functioning.

Future research could also aim to ask questions related to teacher efficacy. Since teachers' practices do not appear consistent with their rating of what they would do in theory, the research could ask questions about the certainty in which teachers are answering the questions. A follow-up question with a Likert scale for asking how sure the teacher is about a given answer would give information about how the teacher is processing the information. Questions could also be asked as to whether or not teachers think there is a difference between the functioning of students based on race/ethnicity, such as the semistructured interview questions that were used in Skiba et al. (2008).

Another piece of information that would be relevant would be the student's home language. Knowing that the student comes from an English-speaking home might give the teachers more insight into how the student is functioning in the classroom and know that language is not impacting the student's academics.

Chapter 6

Action Plan

When considering a professional development training that will take place at the end of the current research, planners should take into consideration the problem of practice associated with the current research. The problem of practice and the focus of the research was potential bias within the referral process, which might lead to overidentification of minority students for special education placement. If bias does exist within the system, then it should be identified as either an implicit bias or prejudice. By definition, implicit bias indicates a process that happens unconsciously. Everyone is said to have some implicit bias, “regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or age” (Staats, 2016, p. 30). With this information, the staff can make necessary changes in the process used to refer students to special education. Providing the instructional staff the resources to understand implicit bias will have the most substantial impact on students and their families. The long-term impact of the research would be on student referrals. If staff were better able to understand the implications of culture, language, and ethnicity and the effect they have on learning, the staff would make fewer inappropriate referrals to special education for minority students.

The study determined that there were no statistically significant differences in the rates of referral of racial and ethnic minority students when compared with White students. The study also found that teachers were most likely to use the overall profile as their primary source of data for determining when a special education referral was warranted. One of the pieces of data which became most concerning within the study was that of agreement on referral with the focus group. The respondents in the study struggled

with identifying students who needed a special education evaluation referral as identified by information provided in a given scenario. Since the agreement or disagreement on referrals stood out the most within the study, professional development will be completed regarding profiles for students who might have a disability.

The Goal of the Training: Learning Objectives

As a result of the training, the learner will understand different types of learning profiles that may indicate the presence of a disability, the special education referral process, and what characteristics are associated with students with disabilities. The learner will be able to make data-driven decisions rather than subjective decisions in referring students to special education. Overall, the goal of the training is to make sure teachers have an understanding of the special education referral process and disabilities to decrease the likelihood of making referrals based on implicit bias.

Time and Location

The professional development training will take place as an online after-school 3-hour event. Afterward, two hour-long follow-up sessions will be used to ensure learners are implementing the information from their sessions. Follow-up sessions will be delivered online. The first will take place approximately six weeks after the main session since this is a typical grading period. It allows teachers to begin to implement the learning. The final session will take place approximately 12 weeks after the main session. This schedule allows teachers the opportunity to gather data and report back. Between each session, a level of use survey will be sent to the teachers so data can be gathered as to how well the teachers are learning the information. A sample of the training model can be found in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Training Model



Participants

The participants will be teachers from across Local ISD. Training will be offered to elementary teachers based on the level they teach. Training will be developed for prekindergarten to second grade teachers and third- through fifth-grade teachers. The training will be provided online, via Zoom or Google Meets. Online training sessions have had greater participation in the district than in person learning sessions. Since the training will be provided online, teachers may not be familiar with each other. An ice breaker will be added to all training sessions to help teachers get to know each other and make them more comfortable in participating in the learning activities. Since elementary teachers participated in the study, the training will not include those teachers who teach secondary grades at this time. Elementary is also where the referral process typically begins, so these teachers are the ideal target.

Training Content

The training will focus on student data and student profiles. Based on the rate of agreement with the focus group referral decisions in the current study, the training will focus on understanding how to begin the process for teachers. The results from the study show that, according to the decisions of the focus group panel, teachers did not refer students who needed to be referred to special education and referred some students for whom referral was not necessary. There are several data pieces to incorporate into a special education referral. The training will focus on failure, grades, behavior, anecdotal details from teachers, and standardized test scores as well as the overall profile. The scenarios from the study and others will be reviewed with the audience to get teachers to think about when a referral for special education is necessary. Teachers will be provided insight into how to gather data and analyze data, looking for patterns that may exist within the profiles.

The second session, or first follow up session, will require the teachers to bring in de-identified data they have collected from one student in their classroom who is struggling. Teachers will be allowed to discuss their data with the group and get feedback from the group as to what they think the next steps would be and whether or not they think a referral to special education evaluation would be necessary.

The third session, second follow up session, will require the teacher to bring updated information on their selected student from the first follow up session. The teacher will review the data with the group and inform the group on the student's progress. The teacher will also share if the student has been referred to special education or is making progress. A sample agenda may be found in Appendix B.

Training Delivery

As a result of the training, there will be what is called in Spring Look Fors, which are visible signs that the training is being implemented. The training is focusing on the ability of teachers to gather and analyze data, so the first Look For would be data gathering. All teachers who have participated in the training will be advised to make binders for their students to hold student data related to grades, behavior, and standardized test scores. These data binders will be available for administrators as well as the Response to Intervention Committee to view. The overall goal of the training is to lead to accurate referrals to special education, so in the long-term, teachers who have been trained in data gathering and analyzing should have a 90%–95% accuracy rate in their referrals to special education over time.

Preliminary Assessment of Participants

Three days prior to the participation in the training, participants will receive a survey. The survey will be delivered via email and maintained via Google Forms. The content of the Likert scale will be hosted on Google Forms. Google Forms is a free program that allows the user to develop a questionnaire. The form collects data that is displayed in a spreadsheet. Data from the Google Form is also displayed in both pie charts and graphs. The goal of the survey is to determine the level of understanding teachers have with collecting data, analyzing data, and steps necessary to complete a special education referral. Sample questions would include: a. How familiar are you with curriculum-based assessments? b. How would you rate your knowledge of analyzing standardized test scores? c. Do you know the first steps to begin the special education referral process? These questions will allow the trainer to have an understanding of the participants prior knowledge before the training begins.

As a part of all training in the district, there is a required Do Now when participants walk into the room, which is an activity to get the participants thinking about the topic. The Do Now for this training will be to answer a question using Jamboard. Jamboard is an online tool that resembles using chart paper around the room. Each slide on the Jamboard is white. Participants are able to add “sticky notes” to the Jamboard with their answers. The question presented in the Do Now would be “What is the goal of special education?” This question will lead educators to think and talk about the process of special education and its intended purpose. The answers to this question from the attendees will guide the trainer in showing the exact reason for special education services and how students receive them.

Formative Assessments

It is important to check for understanding throughout the presentation. Checking ensures that the learning objectives are being met as the presentation goes along. The formative assessment will take place by having the participants share information about what is being learned. This sharing process will come from their speaking out loud or sharing in the chat. This will allow the presenter the opportunity to understand where the participants are in learning what is being presented and to reteach any information that might be misunderstood.

Summative Assessment

After the completion of the training, the participants will be required to take a summative assessment to get credit for the course. Credit will be granted in “Eduphoria,” an online collection of tools used to assist schools in academic record keeping, evaluation, and professional development management. The summative

assessment will be housed on Google Forms. A QR code will be placed on the last screen of the presentation along with a hyperlink to the survey. The participants will be able to access the QR code from their cell phones. For participants who do not have cell phones, they will be able to access the hyperlink. Participants will be required to input their email address as well as their first and last name. This demographic information will give the trainer the information necessary to assign credit for participation. For teachers who do not get at least 70% of the questions correct, the trainer will send a follow-up email to the participant. The follow-up emails will give the participant an option for a face-to-face meeting to further discuss the information that was presented. The summative assessment will have questions related to how special education referrals begin (the full process) and questions about specific student profiles and whether a referral should be generated.

Ongoing Assessment of Levels of Use.

A Likert scale will be developed based on the information that will be presented to the teachers. The Likert scale will be used to determine the level of use of the innovation presented. The innovation will involve teachers using a data-based decision process to complete referrals for special education. The ongoing assessment will be sent out to the teachers three days prior to each of the follow up sessions. The information gathered from the Likert scale will be used by the trainer to evaluate the teacher learning and implementation of the presented strategies.

When processing the levels of use, the Likert scale will have designations from 1 to 8. The description of the Likert scale is presented in Table 7.

Table 7*Likert Scale Descriptions*

Level	Designation	Description
1	Nonuse	I know about special education referrals, but I have not or plan to refer any students to special education shortly.
2	Orientation	I am planning on referring students to special education in the future, and I have read the materials associated with the accuracy of referrals.
3	Preparation	I have received training on special education referrals, and I am setting aside time to study the information with more depth.
4	Mechanical use	I spend the majority of the time in class with the organization of the materials necessary to keep a smooth classroom environment.
5	Routine use	I understand and have incorporated the techniques for data gathering for special education referrals into my classroom for use with my students. I will continue to use the techniques next school year as they are working well for me.
6	Refinement	I have taken the time to reimagine the techniques in a way that works better for my students and me. The basic premise of the techniques are the same, but I have added my information.
7	Integration	Everyone does not have the same skill in utilizing the techniques as I have. I have been working with other teachers so that the techniques are used by multiple people, and we incorporate the information together.
8	Renewal	I am using the techniques, but I am also completing research by reading, talking, and observing others to find out if there is a better program that will be beneficial to my students.

Likert Scale Questions

The content of the Likert scale will be hosted on Google Forms. The content of the Likert scale will surround the basic knowledge of the referral process. Teachers will be asked a series of questions to determine their level of use as it pertains to understanding the special education referral process and using data to make informed decisions. Questions will also be asked regarding which students should receive special education services.

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Appendix A

Scenario 1

Name: Student	Grade: Fifth
Age: 10	Ethnicity: African American

This information is for a 10-year-old African American student currently enrolled in the 5th grade. Current grades indicate that the student is passing all classes. The student has not been retained but has not shown dynamic progress from grade to grade. The student scored in the Approaches Grade Level on 4th grade STAAR in Reading and Writing but did not meet the grade level standard for Math. In the 3rd grade, the student met the Approaches Grade Level standard on STAAR for Math, but not for Reading. Results of the MAP test shows the student has a current RIT score of 198 (Fall of 4th Grade Level) on Reading and 203 (Fall of 4th Grade Level) on Math.

Teachers have reported that the student is sometimes off-task and does not always pay attention in class. The student responds to redirection and reinforcement favorably. With preferential seating and chunked assignments, the student does better with completing work and staying on task in the classroom. Teachers also report that the student has been confrontational with other students on the playground and has one fight with another student during class. The student has had 3 office referrals this school year and 4 last school year. The office referrals were for classroom disruption and insubordination. The student received lunch detention and one day of in school suspension.

Grades

Subjects	Nine-Week Grading Periods of Last School Year				Six-Week Grading Periods of Current School Year	
	1	2	3	4	1	2
Reading	77	80	82		79	80
Math	88	82	77	80	87	90
Science	80	79	80	82	80	83
Social Studies	77	79	80	77	77	77
Physical Education	E	E	E	82	E	E
Music	E	S	S	E	E	S
Art	S	E	E	S	S	E

Conduct	S	E	S	S	N	S
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STAAR Scores

Subjects	Testing Year	
	2017	2018
Reading	1256 Did Not Meet	1441 Approaches Grade Level
Math	1536 Approaches Grade Level	1428 Did Not Meet
Writing	n/a	4412 Approaches Grade Level

Evaluation

Based on the above information, please answer the following questions:

		1	2	3	4	5
Question		Extremely Unlikely (Would Not Refer)	Somewhat Unlikely	Neutral	Somewhat Likely	Extremely Likely (Would Refer)
1.	Based on all the information presented, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Based on the academic performance, how likely are you to recommend this student for special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Based on the student's behavior, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Based on the student's standardized test scores, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluation Continued on Next Page						

5.	Based on the teacher's anecdotal information, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
		Behavior	Grades	Standardized Assessment	Anecdotal Information	Overall Profile
6.	Based on the information provided, which specific piece of data is most compelling to warrant a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5

Scenario 2

Name: Student	Grade: Fifth
Age: 10	Ethnicity: Hispanic

This information is for a 10-year-old Hispanic student currently enrolled in the 5th grade. Current grades indicate that the student is passing all classes. The student has not been retained but has not shown dynamic progress from grade to grade. The student scored in the Approaches Grade Level on 4th grade STAAR in Reading and Writing but did not meet the grade level standard for Math. In the 3rd grade, the student met the Approaches Grade Level standard on STAAR for Math, but not for Reading. Results of the MAP test shows the student has a current RIT score of 198 (Fall of 4th Grade Level) on Reading and 203 (Fall of 4th Grade Level) on Math.

Teachers have reported that the student is sometimes off-task and does not always pay attention in class. The student responds to redirection and reinforcement favorably. With preferential seating and chunked assignments, the student does better with completing work and staying on task in the classroom. Teachers also report that the student has been confrontational with other students on the playground and has one fight with another student during class. The student has had 3 office referrals this school year and 4 last school year. The office referrals were for classroom disruption and insubordination. The student received lunch detention and one day of in school suspension.

Grades

Subjects	Nine-Week Grading Periods of Last School Year				Six-Week Grading Periods of Current School Year	
	1	2	3	4	1	2
Reading	77	80	82		79	80
Math	88	82	77	80	87	90
Science	80	79	80	82	80	83
Social Studies	77	79	80	77	77	77
Physical Education	E	E	E	82	E	E
Music	E	S	S	E	E	S
Art	S	E	E	S	S	E

Conduct	S	E	S	S	N	S
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STAAR Scores

Subjects	Testing Year	
	2017	2018
Reading	1256 Did Not Meet	1441 Approaches Grade Level
Math	1536 Approaches Grade Level	1428 Did Not Meet
Writing	n/a	4412 Approaches Grade Level

Evaluation

Based on the above information, please answer the following questions:

		1	2	3	4	5
Question		Extremely Unlikely (Would Not Refer)	Somewhat Unlikely	Neutral	Somewhat Likely	Extremely Likely (Would Refer)
1.	Based on all the information presented, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Based on the academic performance, how likely are you to recommend this student for special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Based on the student's behavior, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Based on the student's standardized test scores, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluation Continued on Next Page						

5.	Based on the teacher's anecdotal information, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
		Behavior	Grades	Standardized Assessment	Anecdotal Information	Overall Profile
6.	Based on the information provided, which specific piece of data is most compelling to warrant a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5

Scenario 3

Name: Student	Grade: Fifth
Age: 10	Ethnicity: White

This information is for a 10-year-old White student currently enrolled in the 5th grade. Current grades indicate that the student is passing all classes. The student has not been retained but has not shown dynamic progress from grade to grade. The student scored in the Approaches Grade Level on 4th grade STAAR in Reading and Writing but did not meet the grade level standard for Math. In the 3rd grade, the student met the Approaches Grade Level standard on STAAR for Math, but not for Reading. Results of the MAP test shows the student has a current RIT score of 198 (Fall of 4th Grade Level) on Reading and 203 (Fall of 4th Grade Level) on Math.

Teachers have reported that the student is sometimes off-task and does not always pay attention in class. The student responds to redirection and reinforcement favorably. With preferential seating and chunked assignments, the student does better with completing work and staying on task in the classroom. Teachers also report that the student has been confrontational with other students on the playground and has one fight with another student during class. The student has had 3 office referrals this school year and 4 last school year. The office referrals were for classroom disruption and insubordination. The student received lunch detention and one day of in school suspension.

Grades

Subjects	Nine-Week Grading Periods of Last School Year				Six-Week Grading Periods of Current School Year	
	1	2	3	4	1	2
Reading	77	80	82		79	80
Math	88	82	77	80	87	90
Science	80	79	80	82	80	83
Social Studies	77	79	80	77	77	77
Physical Education	E	E	E	82	E	E
Music	E	S	S	E	E	S

Art	S	E	E	S	S	E
Conduct	S	E	S	S	N	S

STAAR Scores

Subjects	Testing Year	
	2017	2018
Reading	1256 Did Not Meet	1441 Approaches Grade Level
Math	1536 Approaches Grade Level	1428 Did Not Meet
Writing	n/a	4412 Approaches Grade Level

Evaluation

Based on the above information, please answer the following questions:

		1	2	3	4	5
Question		Extremely Unlikely (Would Not Refer)	Somewhat Unlikely	Neutral	Somewhat Likely	Extremely Likely (Would Refer)
1.	Based on all the information presented, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Based on the academic performance, how likely are you to recommend this student for special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Based on the student's behavior, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Based on the student's standardized test scores, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5

	<i>Evaluation Continued on Next Page</i>					
5.	Based on the teacher's anecdotal information, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
		Behavior	Grades	Standardized Assessment	Anecdotal Information	Overall Profile
6.	Based on the information provided, which specific piece of data is most compelling to warrant a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5

Scenario 4

Name: Student	Grade: Fifth
Age: 10	Ethnicity: African American

This information is for a 10-year-old African American student currently enrolled in the 5th grade. Current grades indicate that the student is passing all classes, however, grades are low. The student has not been retained but has not shown much progress from grade to grade. The student did not meet grade level standard on 4th grade STAAR in Math, Reading, or Writing. In the 3rd grade, the student did not meet the grade level standard on STAAR for Math or Reading. Results of the MAP test shows the student has a current RIT score of 188 (Fall of 3rd Grade Level) on Reading and 201 (Fall of 4th Grade Level) on Math.

Teachers have reported that the student is often off-task and does not pay attention in class. The student does not always respond to redirection. With preferential seating and chunked assignments, the student continues to struggle to get work completed and turned in on time. Teachers also report that the student has been confrontational with other students on the playground and has one fight with another student during class. The student has had 3 office referrals this school year and 4 last school year. Most of the office referrals were for classroom disruption and insubordination. The student received lunch detention and one day of in school suspension.

Grades

Subjects	Nine-Week Grading Periods of Last School Year				Six-Week Grading Periods of Current School Year	
	1	2	3	4	1	2
Reading	70	71	67	72	68	70
Math	80	76	77	73	71	77
Science	73	79	77	77	79	72
Social Studies	77	79	74	72	72	71
Physical Education	E	E	E	E	E	E
Music	E	S	S	E	E	S

Art	S	E	E	S	S	E
Conduct	S	E	S	S	N	S

STAAR Scores

Subjects	Testing Year	
	2017	2018
Reading	1256 Did Not Meet	1256 Did Not Meet
Math	1300 Did Not Meet	1428 Did Not Meet
Writing	n/a	2585 Did not Meet

Evaluation

Based on the above information, please answer the following questions:

		1	2	3	4	5
Question		Extremely Unlikely (Would Not Refer)	Somewhat Unlikely	Neutral	Somewhat Likely	Extremely Likely (Would Refer)
1.	Based on all the information presented, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Based on the academic performance, how likely are you to recommend this student for special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Based on the student's behavior, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Based on the student's standardized test scores, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5

	<i>Evaluation Continued on Next Page</i>					
5.	Based on the teacher's anecdotal information, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
		Behavior	Grades	Standardized Assessment	Anecdotal Information	Overall Profile
6.	Based on the information provided, which specific piece of data is most compelling to warrant a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5

Scenario 5

Name: Student	Grade: Fifth
Age: 10	Ethnicity: Hispanic

This information is for a 10-year-old Hispanic student currently enrolled in the 5th grade. Current grades indicate that the student is passing all classes, however, grades are low. The student has not been retained but has not shown much progress from grade to grade. The student did not meet grade level standard on 4th grade STAAR in Math, Reading, or Writing. In the 3rd grade, the student did not meet the grade level standard on STAAR for Math or Reading. Results of the MAP test shows the student has a current RIT score of 188 (Fall of 3rd Grade Level) on Reading and 201 (Fall of 4th Grade Level) on Math.

Teachers have reported that the student is often off-task and does not pay attention in class. The student does not always respond to redirection. With preferential seating and chunked assignments, the student continues to struggle to get work completed and turned in on time. Teachers also report that the student has been confrontational with other students on the playground and has one fight with another student during class. The student has had 3 office referrals this school year and 4 last school year. Most of the office referrals were for classroom disruption and insubordination. The student received lunch detention and one day of in school suspension.

Grades

Subjects	Nine-Week Grading Periods of Last School Year				Six-Week Grading Periods of Current School Year	
	1	2	3	4	1	2
Reading	70	71	67	72	68	70
Math	80	76	77	73	71	77
Science	73	79	77	77	79	72
Social Studies	77	79	74	72	72	71
Physical Education	E	E	E	E	E	E
Music	E	S	S	E	E	S
Art	S	E	E	S	S	E

Conduct	S	E	S	S	N	S
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STAAR Scores

Subjects	Testing Year	
	2017	2018
Reading	1256 Did Not Meet	1256 Did Not Meet
Math	1300 Did Not Meet	1428 Did Not Meet
Writing	n/a	2585 Did not Meet

Evaluation

Based on the above information, please answer the following questions:

		1	2	3	4	5
Question		Extremely Unlikely (Would Not Refer)	Somewhat Unlikely	Neutral	Somewhat Likely	Extremely Likely (Would Refer)
1.	Based on all the information presented, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Based on the academic performance, how likely are you to recommend this student for special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Based on the student's behavior, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Based on the student's standardized test scores, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluation Continued on Next Page						

5.	Based on the teacher's anecdotal information, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
		Behavior	Grades	Standardized Assessment	Anecdotal Information	Overall Profile
6.	Based on the information provided, which specific piece of data is most compelling to warrant a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5

Scenario 6

Name: Student	Grade: Fifth
Age: 10	Ethnicity: White

This information is for a 10-year-old White student currently enrolled in the 5th grade. Current grades indicate that the student is passing all classes, however, grades are low. The student has not been retained but has not shown much progress from grade to grade. The student did not meet grade level standard on 4th grade STAAR in Math, Reading, or Writing. In the 3rd grade, the student did not meet the grade level standard on STAAR for Math or Reading. Results of the MAP test shows the student has a current RIT score of 188 (Fall of 3rd Grade Level) on Reading and 201 (Fall of 4th Grade Level) on Math.

Teachers have reported that the student is often off-task and does not pay attention in class. The student does not always respond to redirection. With preferential seating and chunked assignments, the student continues to struggle to get work completed and turned in on time. Teachers also report that the student has been confrontational with other students on the playground and has one fight with another student during class. The student has had 3 office referrals this school year and 4 last school year. Most of the office referrals were for classroom disruption and insubordination. The student received lunch detention and one day of in school suspension.

Grades

Subjects	Nine-Week Grading Periods of Last School Year				Six-Week Grading Periods of Current School Year	
	1	2	3	4	1	2
Reading	70	71	67	72	68	70
Math	80	76	77	73	71	77
Science	73	79	77	77	79	72
Social Studies	77	79	74	72	72	71
Physical Education	E	E	E	E	E	E
Music	E	S	S	E	E	S
Art	S	E	E	S	S	E

Conduct	S	E	S	S	N	S
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STAAR Scores

Subjects	Testing Year	
	2017	2018
Reading	1256 Did Not Meet	1256 Did Not Meet
Math	1300 Did Not Meet	1428 Did Not Meet
Writing	n/a	2585 Did not Meet

Evaluation

Based on the above information, please answer the following questions:

		1	2	3	4	5
Question		Extremely Unlikely (Would Not Refer)	Somewhat Unlikely	Neutral	Somewhat Likely	Extremely Likely (Would Refer)
1.	Based on all the information presented, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Based on the academic performance, how likely are you to recommend this student for special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Based on the student's behavior, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Based on the student's standardized test scores, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluation Continued on Next Page						

5.	Based on the teacher's anecdotal information, how likely are you to recommend this student for a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5
		Behavior	Grades	Standardized Assessment	Anecdotal Information	Overall Profile
6.	Based on the information provided, which specific piece of data is most compelling to warrant a special education referral?	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B

Sample Training Agenda

Time	AGENDA ITEMS	ACTION ITEMS
10 Minutes	<i>Celebrations!</i> Introductions and Welcome	
10 Minutes	Do Now – What is the goal of special education?	Jamboard
45 Minutes	Data Dive – - Standardized Test Scores - Formative Assessments - Summative Assessments - Curriculum Based Assessments - Criterion Assessments	Sample Test Score Packages
15 Minutes	Break	
40 Minutes	Special Education Eligibilities – - Specific Learning Disability - Intellectual Disability - Emotional Disturbance - Autism	TEA Eligibility Criteria
60 Minutes	Student Profiles – - Strengths and Weaknesses - Analyzing the Data - Combining the Data with Eligibilities - Making Data Driven Decisions	Scenarios and Student Profile Sheets

Notes:

[illegible]

Appendix C

Redacted Approval Letter for District Participation in Study

March 6, 2020

David Mapps
4903 Caris Street
Houston, Texas 77091
mappsd@aol.com

Dear Mr. Mapps:

The Independent School District is pleased to approve your study, "Does Teacher Bias Contribute to the Overidentification of Minority Students in Special Education?" The purpose of this study is to explore teacher bias in special education referrals using survey methods. Data will be collected in the spring of 2020.

Approval to conduct the study in Spring ISD is contingent on you meeting the following conditions:

- All ISD elementary school teachers will be asked to participate a survey, which contains a series of scenarios as asks teachers how they would respond. Data will be collected in the spring of 2020. Eligible campuses include: all elementary schools.
- The total time for each teacher's participation will be approximately 30 minutes to one hour.
- No archival data will be requested from the district.
- It is at the discretion of campus principal(s) to participate in the research study. Permission from the principal must be obtained prior to collecting any data.
- All staff participating in this study must provide their informed consent/assent before taking part in the study.
- District, schools, and staff are not identified in the study, and data remain confidential.
- The study does not infringe upon designated instructional time on a campus.
- Approval to conduct the study is granted for fulfillment of a doctoral program at the University of Houston.
- The district receives copies of the completed final report within 30 days after its completion.

Any changes or modifications to the current proposal must be submitted for approval to the ISD's Department of Research, Accountability, and Testing. The district reserves the right to forego its participation in the study at any time without reason. Should you need additional information or have any questions concerning the process, please contact.

Sincerely,