



## **The Over-Representation of Minority Students in Special Education**

*A free online event sponsored by Project LASER*

February 14-28, 2003

Twenty years after the National Research Council (NRC) released its first report on the factors contributing to the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs, over-representation persists. At the request of Congress, the NRC has revisited this problem, this time extending its focus to include the under-representation of minority children in gifted and talented programs. In January 2002, its findings and recommendations were released in the National Academy of Sciences' (NAS) long-awaited report "Minority Students in Special and Gifted Education."

At the heels of the NAS report came the National Alliance of Black School Educators' guide for administrators, "Addressing Over-Representation of African American Students in Special Education: The Prereferral Intervention Process." This publication provides an overview of over-representation along with data that illustrates the magnitude of the problem. It also looks at how the law supports administrators in addressing the issue and how administrators might prevent or intervene through prereferral intervention processes, attention to school climate, family involvement, and professional development.

Linking Academic Scholars to Educational Resources (LASER), a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, is taking a closer look at both of these publications in a free online event, "The Over-Representation of Minority Students in Special Education." In holding this event, LASER is not endorsing either publication, rather it is using them as a means to expand the national dialogue on this critical problem and to explore and urge the development of some much needed solutions.

In another 20 years, where will we be? Specifically, as our nation's school-age population continues to become more ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse, where and how will these children be educated? Will they be segregated in special education? Still under-represented in gifted education? Will their home languages be valued in their schools? Will the achievement gap be any narrower? Or will Congress be asking the NRC to examine this issue once again, because too little has changed?

As Project LASER aims to shape a national urban and high-poverty research agenda, a forum is provided for your input. Researchers, educators, parents, advocates, policymakers, and others are encouraged to review both publications, consider whether their recommendations go far enough to address the seriousness of the issue, and then meet with LASER online to share their thoughts and opinions, and make any additional recommendations.

Dr. Brenda L. Townsend, Professor of Special Education at the University of South Florida and Project Director of LASER, will guide the two-week discussion. Joining her will be several other prominent research scholars who share a passion for improving the education of children from minority, urban, and low-income backgrounds. LASER eagerly awaits your ideas and contributions.

**Week 1 (Feb. 17-23):** *An introduction to the issue explored through the NAS's report "Minority Students in Special and Gifted Education." You may read the full report or brief Executive Summary on the National Academy Press' Web site: <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309074398/html/>.*

**Week 2 (Feb. 24-28):** *An examination of possible solutions explored through the NABSE's report "Addressing Over-Representation of African American Students in Special Education." Download copies from the IDEAPractices' Web site: <http://www.ideapractices.org/resources/detail.php?id=22070>.*

**Log into the discussion at LASER's Web site:  
<http://www.coedu.usf.edu/LASER>.**

