

**CD10-021**

February 26, 2010

MEMORANDUM FOR CHILDREN'S DIVISION STAFF

FROM: PAULA NEESE

SUBJECT: RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITY IN CHILD WELFARE

The purpose of this memo is to increase staff awareness regarding the disproportionate representation of children and youth of color within the child welfare system nationally, and in Missouri. Though I have spoken about this on a videoconference and at other venues, I want to be sure all staff understand what we mean by these basic terms and what we will be doing in 2010 to move forward.

Nationally, in 2000, African American children accounted for 37% of the total number of children in foster care in America and approximately 46% were accounted for by non-Hispanic White children. This was the case despite the fact that African-American children only comprised 15% of the total U.S. child population under 18 in 2000 (U.S. Census).<sup>1</sup>

**Definitions**

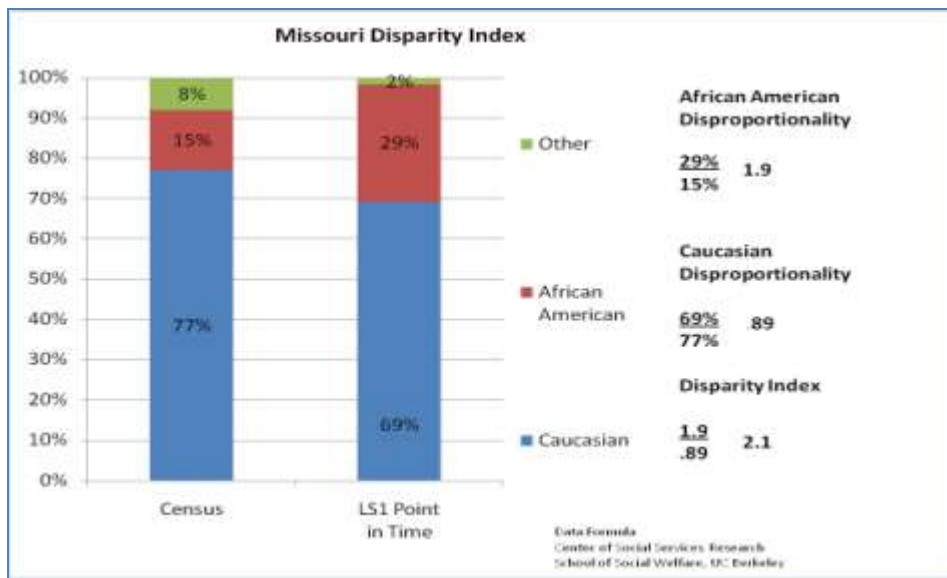
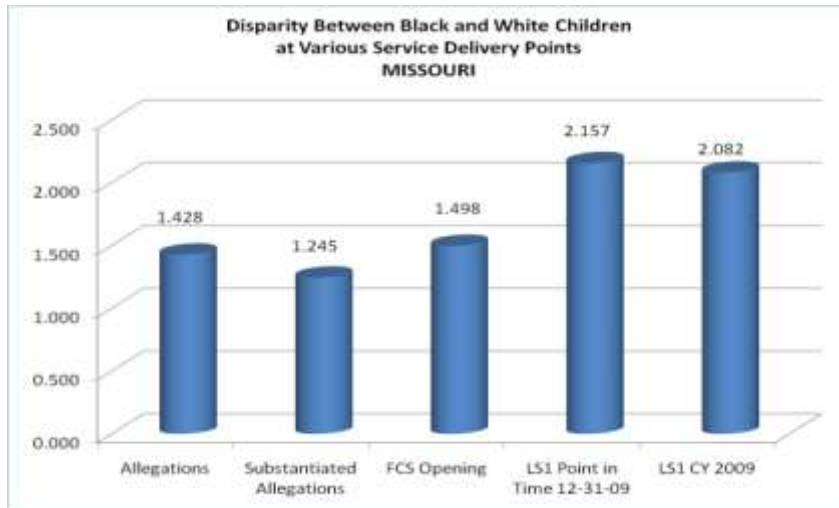
First, it is important for us to have a common definition of the basic concepts of disproportionality and disparity.

Disproportionality: When a group makes up a proportion of those experiencing some event that is higher or lower than that group's proportion of the population.

Disparity: A comparison of one group to another. (e.g. regarding services, outcomes, representation, etc.)

We began looking at our data in 2008, with the help of a grid created by researchers at UC Berkley. With this grid, we can see what our 'disparity ratio' (see second chart for explanation of this) is at various decision points. For example, we can look at the number of CA/N calls that come into the hotline, the number of those that are

substantiated, the number of children and youth that come into state custody and care, etc.



Disparity is computed for each racial group as it compares with another racial group on any given service or outcome. Please note that these Indices should be interpreted cautiously, especially when you chart at the county level where one group being compared is very small in the overall county population.

The charts above show that we clearly have work to do in Missouri, especially when decisions are made regarding black children and youth coming into state care and custody. As you can see above, at a point in time and throughout a year, black children and youth are twice as likely to be removed from their homes as white children and youth.

Those who have more knowledge and understanding in addressing this issue have consistently cautioned us to move slowly and not jump to conclusions for the whys and how's when thinking through our data. With that in mind, we formed a workgroup, with representatives of various job classifications from each region of the state. Casey Family Programs assisted us in developing a 'compressed' (quickly developed) strategic plan. Though we have moved very slowly, we continue to work from that plan today. We are in the infancy stage, but committed to continued progress. I am attaching this group's current [work plan](#).

Our Ultimate Goal: To eliminate disparities and the disproportionate number of children of color in the care of child welfare agencies, learning what works to achieve race equity in child welfare services, in partnership with other state stakeholders and local communities

### **Increasing Awareness and Beginning Analysis**

Phase one seems to be about awareness and analysis. On the other hand, awareness building must also be a continuous cycle. In terms of beginning steps taken so far:

- Quality assurance specialists are trained in using disparity ratio grid. (2008)
- Training was held for workgroup members in St. Louis. (2008)
- Division Director met with state representatives of Office of State Courts Administrator, DMH, Missouri Juvenile Justice Association and Department of Public Safety to share the CD's state data and desire to begin our work. (2008)
- 'Undoing Racism' training was held for division and statewide stakeholder leadership in Columbia. (2009)
- Results Oriented Management dashboard tool under development for staff and private case managers to use for state and local practice outcome measurement, with the ability to factor and compare by race. (2010)
- State workgroup continued to meet. (2008-2010)

Next steps planned:

- Results Oriented Management dashboard ready for roll out Spring of 2010
- Analysis of division mission, vision, and principles with a view of assuring language that promotes racial equity
- Use of focus groups for feedback as we do the above analysis and modifications
- State workgroup will continue meeting quarterly on plan goals and to share promising practices, with 3 private providers of foster care case management joining the group after internal work on CD mission, vision and principles is completed.
- Develop an awareness plan that includes using the video series "Race: The Power of Illusion" and other possible training.
- Keep learning and encouraging strategic, courageous discussions.

Promoting racial equity within the child welfare system obviously must go beyond the Children's Division and private partners who provide case management for children and youth in care. We will be working with court personnel and a vast array of statewide and community level stakeholders along the way, but feel it is very important for us to assess ourselves and promote new learning for change.

Our work on this is not an 'event', but a journey. Our work must be an on-going and continuous process. As we grow in our understanding and begin to have some courageous and critical conversations, we will see movement toward our goal. All of us want the best for all children in Missouri.

Your input and involvement along the way will be critical. Please send your ideas to a member of the [Workgroup for Racial Equity](#). I am attaching the names and contact information for current members. We will be posting minutes from these meetings and other materials through our webpage for you soon. We will be doing this for all of the major working groups we have going on other topics. Thank you for the good work you do and for being a part of our team.

<sup>1</sup> The Race+Child Welfare Project, fact Sheet 1, The Center for the Study of Social Policy. March 16, 2004

PN:kp