



## Public Education

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### **State report: Minneapolis schools violate laws with biased disability classifications**

By [Shanxi Omoniyi](#)

Minneapolis Public Schools has violated state and federal law by overidentifying black students within the “developmental cognitive disability” category, the state’s education department recently concluded.

“The notification is part of an annual review process conducted by the state, as required by federal law, to determine what’s known as ‘disproportionality’ in special education,” the Minnesota Reformer [explained](#).

“Disproportionality is particularly concerning for Black families and their children because they are more likely to be identified in disability categories that are socially stigmatized, like developmental cognitive disabilities or emotional behavior disorder.”

By placing students in these categories, the district often restricts their access to “rigorous coursework, electives and other opportunities open to students without disabilities.”

#### **Instruction ‘often far below grade level standards’**

Meanwhile, a special education [audit](#) by the **Council of Great City Schools** criticized the district for allowing classroom instruction to fall “often far below grade level standards.”

“The report focuses on the district’s failure to use what’s known as a multi-tiered systems of support, or MTSS, a framework commonly used by school districts to identify students who need additional academic or behavior support,” the Reformer explains.

“When implemented correctly, district staff would review student data regularly to identify students needing support; determine appropriate supports for students; review data on the impact of the supports; and adapt supports as necessary. The review cycle can also highlight district-wide issues that need addressing.”

Despite multiple shortcomings noted in the report, “significant fiscal challenges” will probably affect any official district response, according to the Reformer.

“The district closed a \$75 million budget deficit for the upcoming school year by making significant cuts to central office staff, and continues to rely on its dwindling reserves to balance its budget. In the next budget cycle, the district anticipates needing to cut at least \$25 million, a figure that could increase if federal funding is reduced.”