



ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Experiences of MENASWA Families of Students with Disabilities by Soraya Fallah, M.A.

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The graduation rate of students enrolled in special education services is lower than nondisabled students. Students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds, in particular, are falling significantly behind their non-disabled peers. To close the achievement gap, administrators and teachers need appropriate training focused on how to best serve the unique needs of CLD students with disabilities. Research on the characteristics and experiences of diverse families provide education personnel the understanding of a family's cultural framework necessary to build effective family-school partnerships.

Unfortunately, there is currently very little understanding and research literature on families of Middle Eastern, North African, and Southwest Asian (MENASWA) backgrounds and their children, especially as it relates to special education and their experiences. Research on MENASWA students with disabilities have previously been overlooked or difficult to conduct, partially because of racial/ethnic classifications that lack an appropriate choice for this distinct population. Being able to identify needs specific to this population will enable U.S. educators to better collaborate with family members from MENASWA backgrounds in order to be more culturally responsive. (In the existing literature, people from Middle Eastern, North African, and Southwest Asian descent are not referred to as MENASWA; rather, this is a unique acronym to this particular study.)

This mixed-methods study employs an anonymous on-line survey, which asks questions on a Likert scale to obtain quantitative data as well as open-ended questions to get at participants' overall feelings and opinions. The study aims to examine the experiences identified by families of MENASWA backgrounds and their children who have been identified into the U.S. Special Education system and to determine any correlations with specific demographic data. It also intended to determine which strategies for serving students with disabilities are the most helpful, as perceived by the MENASWA families. In addition, this study will fill in some gaps in Pre-K-12 grade research on families of students with disabilities from MENASWA descent.

Individuals interested in participating in this study are strongly encouraged to contact the primary investigator or to go to the survey directly. In addition, teachers and administrators are asked to share the link to the research study to the families with whom they work. Due to the fact that part of the underrepresentation in the research relates to the fact that many individuals from these populations look and identify as White, it is suggested that all families in special education be given access to the survey and be allowed to self-identify. Addressing the needs of our culturally and linguistically diverse learners starts with identifying who they are and what their present level of service and needs are. Families are the best collaborators to share this information with U.S. educators. Only once needs are known can we truly hope to engage in culturally responsive teaching that will help close the achievement gap for all of our learners.

Soraya Fallah, M.A., is a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the Michael D. Eisner College of Education in CSUN with a Masters degree in International Relations and Law. From Kurdish descent, she is familiar with the treatment of disability in pre-K-12 education and issues around educating Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students, both professionally and personally. She is a recipient of numerous awards for her projects and writings, and her research was accepted for the 21st Annual Student Research and Creative Works Symposium and was chosen for the 31st Annual CSU Student Research Competition.

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- Al Khateeb, J. M., Al Hadidi, M. S., & Al Khatib, A. J. (2015). Addressing the unique needs of Arab American children with disabilities. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(8), 2432-2440.
- Murawski, W. W., & Scott, K. L. (2017). *What really works with exceptional learners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

***For more resources & references, please contact the primary investigator, Soraya Fallah, directly at:
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Seeking Survey Participants

We are conducting research to learn more about the experiences of MENASWA families of children with Special Needs in the U.S. special education system. Participants of this study will be asked to fill out an anonymous survey.

To take the survey, please visit:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MENASWA>

In order to participate in this survey research, respondents must be 18 or older, currently live in the United States, have a child or family member with special needs who has been served by special education system in the United States during past 10 years, be a member of a community that is either immigrant or has a family of origin from a country, region, and ethnic or religious minority group considered to be part of Middle East, North Africa, and Southwest Asia. (The following countries and territories are included as MENASWA: Afghanistan, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Djibouti, Egypt, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kurdistan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, The United Arab Emirates, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine (The West Bank and Gaza Strip), Qatar, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Yemen.) **Please note that this study is intended to be inclusive of all families who have ties to these regions, therefore all ethnic and religious groups from the Middle East, North Africa, and Southwest Asia are encouraged to take this survey.** This includes, but is not limited to: Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Azari, Bahá'is, Balochs, Chaldean, Druze, Kurds, Lurs, Persian, Turkmens, Turks, Yazidis, Zazas, and others can participate in this study, even if not specifically named above.

For questions or additional information about this study, please contact:

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The study has been reviewed and approved by the CSUN IRB on 10/28/2016, #161-7053

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