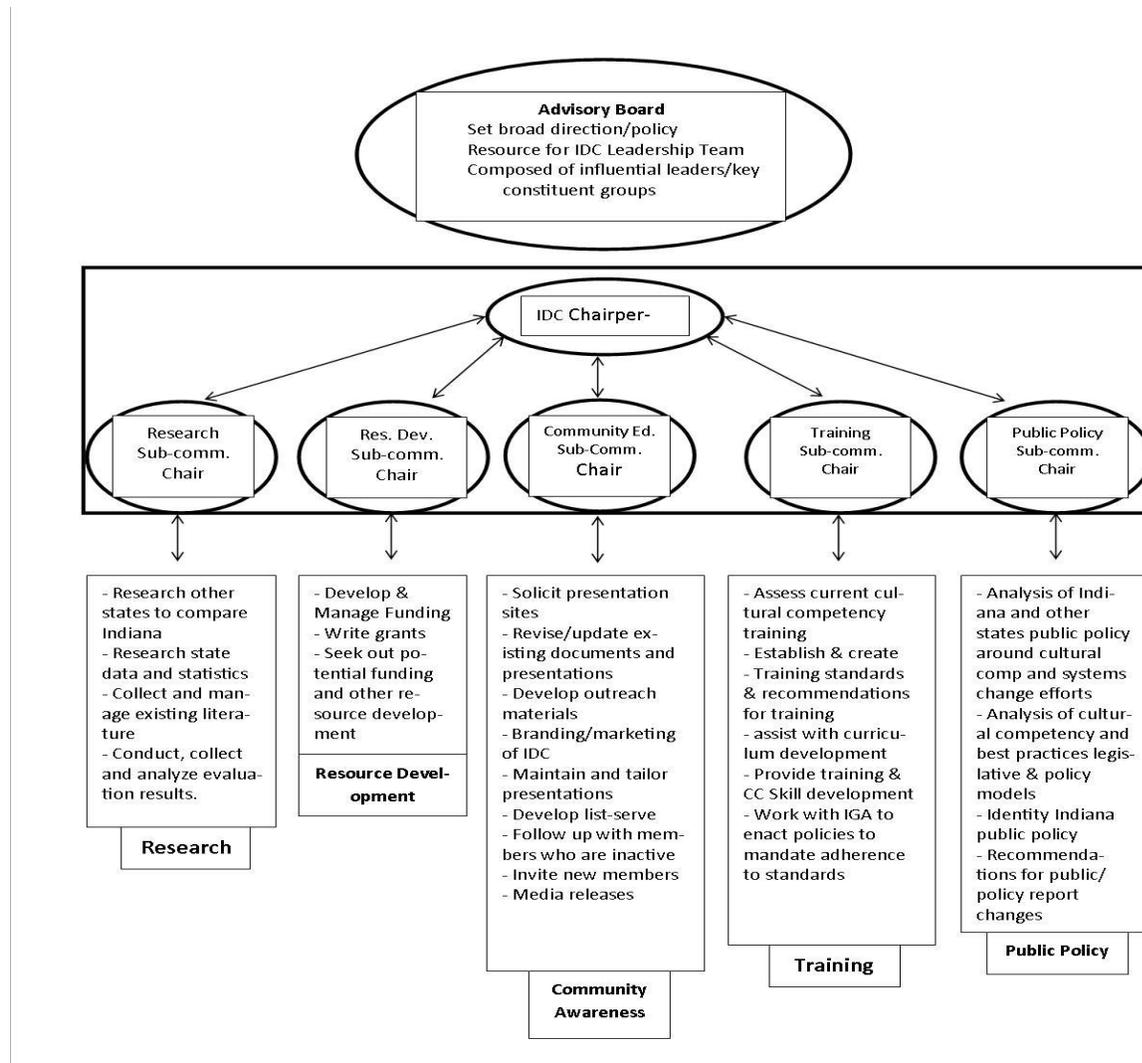


Back in 2004, the committee established the following five objectives:

1. To research issues of disproportionality and over-representation of minorities in the state system of child welfare;
2. To increase awareness that Indiana has disproportional representation of children of color in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Services;
3. To train all public and private professionals that work with children and families on this issue;
4. To promote a service delivery agenda that address disproportional issues; and
5. To promote public policies in the state that address disproportionality in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Busch et al., 2008, p. 258)

The chart below, explains the five subcommittees created to address multiple goals of “research, resource development, community awareness, training, and public policy” (Busch, et. al., 2008, p. 258).



During the initial organization period of the IDC, members of the committee recognized the inter-connectivity of other youth-serving institutions. State leaders in the field of education, health, child welfare and mental health were included in the larger discussion. As a result of this ongoing planning,

dialogue resulted with state legislators who introduced a bill addressing concerns about known disparities. In 2007, the Indiana General Assembly created the Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services to evaluate data and practices that related to disproportionate representation of youth of color in child welfare, juvenile justice, education and mental health fields.

Lead by co-chairs, Ms. Angela Green, Indiana Department of Child Services and Dr. Michael Patchner, Dean, Indiana University School of Social Work, the commission worked with four sub-committees that included appointees as outlined in the legislation and other state-wide representation from the respective fields. The commission findings, released in October 2008, analyzed information in three ways across all four systems:

1. What is the extent of disproportionality in youth services in Indiana?
2. What evidence-based, best/promising practices are there to eliminate or significantly reduce disproportionate representation?
3. Why do disproportionality and disparity occur?

The study reported:

Child Welfare Findings: African Americans are over-represented in foster care, comprising approximately 28% of those in care in Indiana, even though they constitute 8.9% of the state's youth population. Latino youth are slightly over-represented, comprising 5% of the foster care population, compared with 4.3% of the general youth population. (Indiana Department of Child Services ICWIS Year End Reports, 2005)

Education Findings: African American students are 3.4 times more likely than White students to be suspended out-of-school and over twice as likely to be expelled. Native American, Latino, and Multiracial students are also over-represented in statewide rates of out-of-school suspension (IDOE, Suspension/Expulsion Report 2006-07)

Juvenile Justice Findings: African American youth are 2.64 times more likely to be arrested than other youth and .52 times less likely to be diverted to alternative programs than other youth. (Skiba, R., Rausch, K., Abbott, D., & Simmons, A. 2007).

Mental Health Findings: Youth with undiagnosed or misdiagnosed mental health challenges are more likely to experience school expulsions, juvenile detention, or placement in other settings that may be unresponsive to their needs. African Americans tend to be over-represented in each of the situations described above, yet are under-represented among those obtaining mental health services. (NAMI, 2007. African American Community Mental Health Fact Sheet).

Along with using numerical data and research of literature on promising practices, the commission gathered input through forums held throughout the state from about 500 individuals and organizations. The report summarized 74 recommendations from the four areas studied into eight broad overarching strands:

1. Data-driven objective decision making in a culturally competent manner at all decision points and interactions with youth.
2. Standardized, disaggregated race-specific data collection that instills system accountability and

responsiveness to youth of color.

3. Cultural competency training and systemic responsiveness to the needs of youth.
4. Diverse and bi-lingual workforce reflecting the youth populations being served.
5. Provision of timely, evidence-based services to keep youth of color in home and in school, and prevent their contact with other more restrictive systems.
6. Child-serving agencies using best/promising practices that eliminate disparities in treatment and provision of services for the youth they serve.
7. Inter-agency, intra- and cross-system coordination and collaboration to implement recommendations.
8. Provision of sufficient resources to implement and sustain programming.

The report concluded:

- Disproportionality is present in all systems.
- Disproportionality is complex; there are no simple solutions.
- Disproportionality requires a consistent effort over time.
- Disproportionality in our social systems is a product that took many years to create. It will not be erased without serious and sustained effort (pp. 61-62).

As a result of the commission's work, several key pieces of legislation resulted that have the potential to bring changes in practice throughout the state.

Moving forward, IDC and its members and partners from concerned agencies and organizations continue to inform the larger community, monitor progress, evaluate and assess ongoing issues and policy, and stress accountability for reaching our primary goal of eliminating disproportionality from all youth serving organizations related to child welfare, education, health, juvenile justice, and mental health.

Reference:

Busch, M., Wall, J. R., Koch, S. M., & Anderson, C. (2008). Addressing the disproportionate representation of children of color: A collaborative community approach. *Child Welfare*, 87(2), 255–278.

Indiana Commission on Abused and Neglected Children and their Families. (2004). Putting children first. Retrieved from <http://www.in.gov/legislative/igareports/agencyarchive/reports/ANCH01.pdf>

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