The CSPD Project is funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Indian Education Programs, Center for School Improvement.

The Navajo NETWORK NEWS

The Navajo NETWORK NEWS

Volume 1, Issue 8

December 2004

GREETINGS OF THE SEASON

The ICOP CSPD program has been in existence for more than two years. During that time we have been fortunate to learn more and more about the strengths and gifts of the dedicated people who serve children through the BIA school system on the Navajo Nation as well as on a national level. The network of teachers, residential staffers, administrators, and parents are an extensive support system for the next generation.

This issue of the Navajo Network News focuses on the family as it supports our students. We embrace the definition of family adopted by the New Mexico Memorial Task Force in 1990, an inclusive definition that recognizes the contributions many, many people make to support our children. Each of you plays a part, both in your own family of origin and in the lives of the students you work with. We thank you for your contribution. Best Wishes for a joyful holiday season.

What is a Family?

We all come from families. Families are big, small, extended, nuclear, multi-generational, with one parent, two parents and grandparents. We live under one roof or many. A family can be as temporary as a few weeks, as permanent as forever. We become part of a family by birth, adoption, marriage or from a desire for mutual support. As family members, we nurture, protect, and influence one another. Families are dynamic and are cultures unto themselves, with different values and unique ways of realizing dreams. Together, our families become the source of our rich cultural heritage and spiritual diversity. Each family has strengths and qualities that flow from individual members and from the family as a unit. Our families create neighborhoods, communities, states and nations.

New Mexico's Memorial 5 Task Force on Children & Families: The Coalition for Children 1990

Parents and Advocacy:

What Works for Them

M. Pedersen

A recent article in Research Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities (Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull, & Summers, 2004), reported on parents’ perception of advocacy activities on behalf of their children with disabilities. Various themes emerged from focus groups with parents in different parts of the country. Of interest to educators is knowing that advocacy places stress on families, that parents place value on the quality of their children’s educational opportunities, and parents value the family-professional partnership.

Transitions:

Diane Lenz, our colleague at NAU, will be leaving ICOP to work on other projects at the Institute for Human Development. Join us in wishing Diane well in her new role. We will miss her in our ICOP family.

Parents and Advocacy:

What Works for Them

M. Pedersen

A recent article in Research Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities (Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull, & Summers, 2004), reported on parents’ perception of advocacy activities on behalf of their children with disabilities. Various themes emerged from focus groups with parents in different parts of the country. Of interest to educators is knowing that advocacy places stress on families, that parents place value on the quality of their children’s educational opportunities, and parents value the family-professional partnership.

Transitions:

Diane Lenz, our colleague at NAU, will be leaving ICOP to work on other projects at the Institute for Human Development. Join us in wishing Diane well in her new role. We will miss her in our ICOP family.

University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Services
Parents and Advocacy: What Works for Them (continued)

The parents interviewed frequently described advocacy as an obligation. They felt that they were sometimes their children’s only advocates. The role as an advocate helped them cope with their child’s disability as well. They also felt that they needed to develop new skills including understanding the child’s disability, knowing their rights; knowing how to get resources and information; knowing how to ask for help; and maintaining documentation of conversations and contacts.

Dissatisfaction with the quality of their child’s education was the main reason parents became advocates in the first place. Their greatest satisfaction was knowing that the educational system was meeting their child’s needs. They described this as “peace of mind” and “like a dream world.”

Family professional partnerships play a major role in advocacy. Parents felt that they would have to take a lesser role as advocates if professionals sought partnerships with families in the first place, addressing educational quality up front. What this would look like to parents included open communication that was not professionally distant and equal status of parents on educational planning teams.

Conflicting values between school and home were also of concern to parents. This resulted in a lack of trust and respect and heavy handedness by the professional staff, parents reported.

The article includes “tips” for supporting parent advocacy, reprinted below. Check out Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities for the full article, or contact Dawn at 505/272-6988 (dgigerich@salud.unm.edu) if you would like a copy.

Tips for Educators in Facilitating Parent Advocacy

Taking action to support parental advocacy

- Becoming an agent of change within the system in which you work
- Undertaking a stronger advocacy role
- Speaking up for the best interests of student and their families when working with other service providers
- Asking families about the role they would like to take and respect their preferences

Taking action to improve the quality of the child’s education

- Carrying out your duty to best serve students with special needs
- Presenting an attitude of “we are here to put forth our best efforts on behalf of students and families”
- Becoming motivated to enhance your knowledge and skills to work effectively with students with special needs and their families
- Providing services in a way that is consistent with families’ values
- Providing all related information to families during all phases of the service delivery process
- Providing information and help to facilitate families’ resources
- Ensuring an efficient, flexible, and comprehensive evaluation process by taking into account families’ concerns and needs
- Providing support to promote student’s access to the general curriculum
- Working with families to achieve clear and meaningful IEP goals
- Developing cross-cultural competence to better work with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Taking action to improve partnerships
  - Viewing family members as equal partners in the decision-making process
  - Showing respect for families’ values and beliefs
  - Listening to families without being judgmental
  - Recognizing families’ opinions and expertise about their child’s strengths and needs
  - Being friendly and using words that families can easily understand
  - Being responsive to families’ requests and concerns
  - Protecting families’ privacy
  - Avoiding conflict even when disagreeing with families’ opinions.


SEMESTER TRAINING UPDATES

ENA: 82 participants have completed Level II Residential training.
Shirock: 48 participants have completed Level I Residential training. Our thanks to the Shiprock Agency School Board and Dr. Sherry Alison for their strong support in making this training available.

We have been privileged to have Dr. Angelita Felix and Dr. Robin Butterfield make site visits to training events on the Navajo Nation this fall. They expressed their pleasure with the effort and thoughtfulness you, the participants, have put into your training and work with children.

SPRING TRAINING PLANS

We are working to schedule WNA and Ft. Defiance Level I training. Our thanks to the Shiprock Agency School Board and Dr. Sherry Alison for their strong support in making this training available.

FREE STUFF

The Navajo Nation Division of Education has made additional copies of the Learn Your Rights video and audiotapes available to Navajo speaking parents. Call Dawn at 505/272-6988 (dgigerich@salud.unm.edu) if you would like more copies.