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OIEP National Early Childhood Conference

Dr. Troy Justesen, Acting Assistant Secretary of Education for the U. S. Department of Education, OSERS, recently addressed the OIEP Early Childhood Conference in Albuquerque. Following are notes of his keynote address:

A need for high expectations:

Going to college, community college, or trade school is the pathway to success. Share your expectations for children with parents. Set high expectations. Tell them their children can and will do more. No matter how severe the disability, the expectations of success are far greater than you may think.

Over identification of Native children in special education:

There are a high number of Indian children in special education. The average enrollment in special education in BIA schools is 22% as opposed to 9% nationally. It is important not to over identify Native children, especially boys. There may be some bias. We want to work with you in your community schools so that there is not over identification of Native children in special education.

Placement rates are a concern:

Among those five year olds in BIA schools, 68% are shown to have speech and language impairments. This is not a problem of over representation or over-identification if there is a need for services. But, if your primary language is not English, that is not the reason to determine you have language impairment.

Child Find:

Work to strengthen child find activities. The BIA has targeted child find efforts through Project Achieve.

Parental Involvement:

This is important to outcomes and we need parents involved in IEP development and other efforts supporting their children. Many parents of Indian students are not aware of their rights and responsibilities under special education law. I am here to convey the message that this is very important.

Transition:

The BIA biennial report is submitted each year. It includes information about children 0-5 years old. It includes the numbers of children served, the contracts in place and cooperative agreements to improve services. The BIA serves as a flow-through to 60 tribes. BIA is now establishing a "baby monitoring" system. It will include baseline, trend data, progress and slippage, and other important information.

Measuring Progress:

Of the 574 third graders in BIA schools, 90% took regular tests and most were above average. The BIA is assisting schools in math and reading.

There are strong examples of early childhood programs on tribal lands:

- The Navajo Nation has a tribal program that coordinates child find activities, provides interim service coordination, advocacy, screening, and parent training.
- The Pueblo of Laguna serves children and families across six pueblo villages.
- The FACE Programs, serving children K-3, work with children with disabilities and their families in 39 schools, serving 20,000 families.
- The Baby FACE Program, established in 2003, provided technical assistance and support to 60 American Indian communities.
- The BIA collaborates with national programs including Parents as Teachers, addressing family literacy, adult education and early childhood education, in coordination with the Baby FACE and FACE programs.

The U.S. Office of Education will be a part of these efforts. I want to make sure your Department or Education serves your needs. Questions and Answers followed the address.

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SUPER SIZE

In the recent documentary film *Super Size Me* (2004), Morgan Spurlock shared the results of his life on foods exclusively from a popular fast food chain. Within a few weeks, Mr. Spurlock had not only gained a considerable amount of weight but also developed damage to vital organs.

Obesity is thought to account for over 300,000 deaths in the U.S. each year. These are preventable deaths. This is a health risk second only to that caused by cigarette smoking.

Obesity and overweight among Americans has increased dramatically in the past two decades by doubling in adults and children and tripling in adolescents. Two thirds of Americans are overweight or obese.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) have prioritized obesity and overweight issues, with the CDC identifying educators as vital to success in turning this epidemic around. They have suggested:

- Revising school curriculum to include messages about diet and nutrition;
- Increasing physical activity among students;
- Reducing television viewing;
- Altering school environments to provide more healthful foods and beverages;
- Promoting walking and active after school programs;
- Providing a healthy diet.

School principals, teachers, parents and school board members grapple with the conflict of classroom time dedicated to academic achievement, curriculum with little leeway, and the need for activity, physical education, and nutritional knowledge in order to develop healthy bodies and healthy life styles. Clearly, all are important in preparing students for healthy and productive lives.

While the death toll is currently high from obesity, we can only expect it to climb as our children become adults. Related health problems will be very significant. This has become a public health epidemic.

How does your school address these needs and sometimes competing priorities? Let us know how you are working to support students' academic learning as well as a healthy lifestyle to take them into adulthood. Contact Dawn at: dgiegerich@salud.unm.edu, or by phone at 505/272-6988, to share successes in your school, or difficulties in reconciling this potential conflict. Together, maybe we can learn from each other about what is most successful through your efforts on the Navajo Nation.

References:

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- Datar, A. & Strum, R. (2004). Physical Education in Elementary School and Body Mass Index: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, *Journal of Public Health*, 94, 9 1501-1506.
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Did You Know...

Developing The Whole Child conference has become an annual event held in Gallup for those serving young children in the Four Corners Area. This year, the conference will be held April 8-9, 2005. Conference planners are always looking for new and exciting presentations from those working in the field with young students and families. Contact www.wnmu.org and follow the link for "Hosted Sites" for more information about attending AND presenting at this great local event.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal program that supports eligible people with disabilities through financial assistance and other considerations. There is a comprehensive determination process that must be completed, but the program provides very important financial support and benefits to eligible people with disabilities, including some students in special education. On our website, we provide detailed information about SSI and the application process. This information is provided in English AND Navajo, as well as Spanish. Check this out at <http://cdd.unm.edu/CSPD/tools-n-docs.htm> for information that may be of great value to the students and families you serve.

LINC here at the Center for Development and Disability is a free resource for you. This comprehensive library offers access to books, journals, videos, and other professional resources for those working with students with disabilities. We are increasing our Native American collection. Check this out at <http://cdd.unm.edu/linc/>. Our catalog is on-line.

SPRING TRAINING UPDATES

Currently we are training 134 residential staff from Western Navajo and Fort Defiance in Level I and Level II Residential Staff training. Additional training for residential staff from Chinle and Shiprock agencies are in the planning stages for Summer and Fall 2005 We will pass on training dates when available.

FREE STUFF (Again!)

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 (dgiegerich@salud.unm.edu) if you would like more copies.