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ABSTRACT

This issue of the "Early Childhood Bulletin" consists of excerpts from a speech given by Dr. Robert Davila, Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, during an Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) Parents Meeting, September 1991, in Arlington, Virginia. In his speech, Dr. Davila calls for a revolution in special education to ensure that children with disabilities receive quality services and a genuine opportunity to participate in their communities and in the global arena. He also discusses the importance of parent empowerment and parent participation at the local level. Section two includes responses to Dr. Davila's speech from three ICC parents, including: Christel Dawkins from Louisiana, Gayle L. Underdown from North Carolina, and Kim Brame from California. Also included are excerpts from the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) position statement on goal one of America 2000, that all children will start school ready to learn. (SG)

COALITION QUARTERLY
EARLY CHILDHOOD BULLETIN

SPRING
1992

AMERICA 2000 AND PART H

By

DR. ROBERT DAVILA

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News by and for Parent Members of State Interagency Coordinating Councils

Spring

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1992

America 2000 and Part H

By Dr. Robert Davila

Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Excerpts of a speech given at the NECTAS-sponsored ICC Parents Meeting, September 1991 in Arlington, Virginia

Secretary Alexander has asked me to advise him on how to ensure that students with disabilities can participate in America 2000. I have formed an internal America 2000 work group, consisting of representatives from each OSERS component, to draft a plan for OSERS and the Department of Education. This plan will outline how those of us in the disability community — students, parents, educators and administrators — will work to ensure that students with disabilities reap the benefits of education reform. At the federal level, we will also look for ways we can share our knowledge with the rest of the education community and strengthen our ties with regular education. And we will seek ways to provide assistance to and empower individuals with disabilities, their families, and other advocates to ensure that America 2000 reaches every student, including students with disabilities. This plan needs your input, your ideas, and your strategies in order to be effective, and we will work with you to ensure that information is shared.

The President has asked each one of us to become more involved in the education of our children — in the home, in the school house, and in the community. He has called for a revolution in education. Truly, it's time for a revolution in special education. Together, we can forge a new role for special education. Our strengths — programs that have improved lives of millions of children with disabilities — can be a model for regular education. Let's share our expertise with regular educators. Let's team up with parents of children who are not disabled. Let's dedicate ourselves to ensuring that children with disabilities will receive quality services that will give them a genuine opportunity to participate in our communities and compete in the global arena.

As Part H parents whose children will be making the transition to Part B and school, you are in a unique position. You have experience with a program many parents and educators would like their communities to provide for all children. Part H reflects the latest thinking

on achieving the first national education goal: ensuring that children arrive at school ready to learn. It affects every other national goal, too, because by providing children and their families with the services they need early in the child's life, the child is able to interact with his or her nondisabled peers at an earlier age. And the child is better able to learn the life skills necessary to participate in American society to the best of his or her ability. Today, early childhood services are a cornerstone of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). As you have reason to know, coordinating the many services and agencies involved in Part H can be challenging. Yet, in many ways, Part H has exceeded its advocates' expectations. More than a mere framework, Part H has encouraged major reforms in service delivery. I am confident that the family-centered, coordinated early childhood services mandated by Part H can be a model for education reform and an integral part of America 2000 communities.

Key to Part H, indeed key to the entire Individuals with Disabilities Education, is parental empowerment. As you become more familiar with America 2000, you will begin to realize that it is not a federal program but rather a national strategy. It honors local control and relies on local initiative. And its success depends on you and your involvement at the local level. As trained advocates for your children, you will ensure that your communities adopt strategies to accommodate children with disabilities in New American Schools. You will share your expertise based on your experiences under Part H, one of the most innovative education laws in the country. You will make sure that special education and regular education work together to teach all students, including students with disabilities. You will insist that high quality services for children with disabilities are an integral part of America 2000. And you will demand a role for parent involvement at every stage of school reform. That is parent empowerment, and it is crucial to the success of the President's America 2000 strategy. ■

ICC Parents' Responses to Dr. Davila's Speech

by **Christel Dawkins** from Louisiana

I first heard of America 2000 in an article in *Parade Magazine* and thought it could never happen here. A few weeks later I heard Dr. Davila, and thought, well maybe. When I got back to Louisiana after the conference I told some of my friends and their eyes just lit up. Here was an incentive for our local school board to open the door.

Our local school district has been cited for violation of the Least Restrictive Environment requirement for Part B and the local system is also faced with a class action law suit under Section 504. The local school board and special education department are very sensitive to this. A group of parents of children in special education asked for a round table discussion with the school board on Least Restrictive Environment, and they agreed to talk to us. We took this opportunity to introduce the idea of restructuring special and regular education following the concepts of America 2000. Their reply was an awkward silence. We went home discouraged. That evening the superintendent presented the America 2000 Strategy to the full school board. It was approved!

Since that time last October the relationship between families with children receiving special education services and the school administration has dramatically improved. I think that they have finally realized that we do know what we are talking about, that we have credibility in the community, and that we all want exactly the same thing, quality education for all children. ■

by **Kim Brame** from California

Dr. Davila also mentioned that educators and children in regular and special education programs can learn from and about one another. I feel strongly that such opportunities for integration involving typical children and children with disabilities is essential to their growth and development. ■

by **Gayle L. Underdown** from North Carolina

I share with the President the value of the first five years and their impact on a person's life. While I applaud the emphasis on these developmental years in the first goal, I must say I have never met a young child who is **not** ready to learn! I believe children enter the world ready to learn about themselves, others, rules of nature, limits of rules, and life. If there is ever a period of time in a person's life when they are **most** ready to learn, it is in those first five years. I'm glad our nation will give a high priority to this time period.

How extremely important are those years to a child born with disabilities! I am so thankful that PL 99-457 was passed in 1986, the same year my son, Matthew, was born with Down syndrome. PL 99-457 has enabled him to benefit from early intervention! His readiness to learn has been unbelievably obvious from the first days of his life.

It is not enough that children start school ready to learn; our schools and teachers must also be ready to teach. Our education system has important information to use from Part H or IDEA. Part H recognizes a child as an individual within a family; both components are crucial to his or her success. Recognizing each child's individuality eliminates the need for dehumanizing labels which do not accurately describe people. The family's role in decision-making and actual intervention necessitates a partnership between parents and professionals. Very young children are eager to learn because learning is relevant and occurs in every event of their lives not just from 9am - 3pm. ■

Excerpts from the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Position Statement on Goal One of America 2000 — All Children Will Start School Ready to Learn

- Schools should be ready to accept and effectively educate all children.
- Schooling will succeed or fail, not children.
- Reaching Goal One requires healthy and competent parents, wanted and healthy babies, decent housing, and adequate nutrition.
- Quality early education and child care should be a birth right for all children. These services must be comprehensive, coordinated, focused on individual family and child needs, and available to all families that need and choose to use them.
- Education in the 21st century must attend to children's social and emotional growth and development, not merely focus on academic outcomes.

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