

Improving tribal consultation with Head Start



CATHY ABRAMSON, DIRECTOR, UNIT I

I serve as our Head Start Policy Council's board of directors liaison. Because we have an excellent director, Anne Suggitt, a hardworking staff and policy council, our Head Start/Early

Head Start Program is exemplary. Our program sets an outstanding example for serving our youth and their families throughout Indian Country.

On Feb. 15, I testified on behalf of our tribe during the Head Start Tribal consultation that was held in Petoskey. This was the first time that a consultation was held in our Midwest region. In order for our program to continue as the success that it is, issues were addressed to top officials from Washington, D.C.'s Central Office of Head Start.

A major issue is teacher qualifications. "The Secretary shall ensure that not later than Sept. 30, 2013, at least 50 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide in center based programs have (i) a baccalaureate or advanced degree in early childhood education; or

(ii) a baccalaureate or advanced degree and coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education with experience teaching pre-school age children."

Our tribe has been very proactive and supportive of securing educational opportunities for our staff so they may meet the Head Start Act of 2007 educational requirements. Three of our five teachers have their degrees and two will receive the associate degrees by December 2012. It is difficult to recruit new teachers in our area who meet these requirements.

The Office of Head Start needs to 1) Address the fact that not all areas of the country have qualified potential candidates in the early childhood education (ECE) field; 2) provide clear definitions of their expectations for accept-

able coursework equivalent to a major in ECE; 3) provide a timeline for individual grantees and their employees to obtain needed coursework; and 4) issue very clear expectations of individual programs as they relate to this mandate.

Another issue is training and technical assistance (T/TA). The Office of Head Start needs to be proactive in designing a T/TA system that is relevant for tribal grantees and programs. The current system is not effective or efficient. The money appropriated to T/TA needs to be used to train tribal programs, not T/TA contractors every four years.

A third issue is communications: Since 2005, timely, accurate and consistent communication by the regional office with American Indian/Alaskan Native

programs is lacking. A single point of communication needs to be established for the dissemination of information, guidance, support and directions when all tribal grantees are affected.

To conclude, we need an improved tribal consultation process where funding allocations, distribution formulas and other issues affecting the delivery of AI/AN Head Start and Early Head Start services are openly discussed and resolved in a timely manner. The Office of Head Start needs to develop its own tribal consultation policy in consultation with AI/AN grantees.

Since I am limited to 500 words during the election period, I would appreciate it if you would call me with any issues or concerns at (906) 322-3823 or email me at cabramson@saulttribe.net.