



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DoDEA Reports Progress in Resolving Issues

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA – DoDEA Director Lillian Gonzalez said she wants all stakeholders in DoD Schools in Europe to know that, “We’ve heard your issues, appreciate your input and we are working diligently to resolve areas of concern.” She added that she has taken numerous issues surfaced in Europe since last school year back to her staff to work.

“Town hall meetings, school and community advisory councils and other types of meetings aimed at creating better dialogue and involvement of stakeholders in DoD Education Activity decisions are extremely important. These meetings help me keep a pulse on what the issues are and how we can better partner with parents and community leaders to continue to improve our education system.”

Gonzalez noted that most current issues fall into six categories: Mathematics Curriculum (MathLand); Communication and Involvement (Parental/ Community/Command Involvement in DoDDS Decision Making); Availability of Advanced Placement and Vocational Programs; Funding (Full Day Kindergarten, Preschool Programs, Summer School, Reduced Pupil/Teacher ratios, and program based staffing); Quality of Instruction (Curriculum Standards, Longitudinal Study); and Customer Satisfaction.

“I really would like for every stakeholder to know that we take each of their concerns very seriously. We at DoDEA are committed to continued improvements in communication with stakeholders and their involvement in the education decision making process,” Gonzalez said. She concluded by saying she is gratified that many parents are noting changes in the system. “Parents are commenting that schools are more welcoming this year, that we have made progress in our efforts to improve communication, and that they appreciate our work to involve them in decisions. I believe we are all moving in the right direction. Together we can all be part of positive solutions. Our children will reap the benefits of our partnership.”

Gonzalez provided the following update on issues and ongoing actions to address them:

- **Mathematics Curriculum (MathLand):** Three issues were raised: K-6 Mathematics curriculum needs more focus on the basics; MathLand does not teach adequate skills; and MathLand: Program Quality, Teacher Understanding.

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ACTIONS: All teachers/schools have provided information regarding the components of the DoDDS K-6 Mathematics Curriculum and supporting instructional materials. DoDEA is providing supplemental instructional materials to support the existing math resources for the short-term. Supplemental Materials Task Groups composed of parents, educators, and curriculum specialists have met in Europe and the Pacific to determine material requirements and selection criteria. New materials have been purchased and are being delivered to schools now. The long-term solution involves accelerating the review and adoption of instructional material based on the DoDDS mathematics curriculum standard. DoDEA has committed to deliver and implement newly adopted instructional materials by SY 2000-2001, one year in advance of the regular schedule.

- **Communication and Involvement** (DoDEA Responsiveness, Parental/Community/Command Involvement in DoDDS Decision Making): Four issues were raised: Need More Accountability in schools; School budget and staffing authorizations are not made available to School Advisory Council; Testing printouts need to be reader-friendly; and DoDEA does not respond to written inquiries in a timely fashion.

ACTIONS: DoDEA has revitalized the advisory committees and increased their participation in the decision-making process. Schools and districts are required to disclose all budget and accountability report/profiles; and principals have been directed to explain circumstances to community. DoDEA Headquarters has reissued school advisory council guidelines. District and Area Advisory Councils have been instituted. DoDEA has implemented a new correspondence tracking system and new procedures to respond to correspondents immediately upon receipt of letter with notification of receipt, control number, and expected response date. Actions/responses are closely monitored.

- **Availability of Programs (Talented and Gifted, Advanced Placement, and Vocational)**

ACTIONS: Availability of Talented and Gifted (TAG) programs were surfaced in town hall meetings where DoDEA promised to explain the program to the School Advisory Councils in appropriate written communication and address local decisions regarding staffing. Principals and superintendents are monitoring the quality of instruction. DoDEA Headquarters reviewed and republished the TAG program staffing guidance and will include TAG program needs analysis, development, and resourcing in focus/task groups to be held in School Year 1998-1999. These focus/task groups are expected to complete their work by February 1999. A newer issue is the number of Advance Placement Programs available as a result of the small size of many high schools and the limited number of Vocational Programs. Regarding Advance Placement, Algebra, geometry, and foreign languages are now available to seventh and eighth grade students for high school credit. DoDDS is able to offer at least two AP courses at every high school and additional offerings are dependent on manpower resources. Distance Education and correspondence courses are offered at all high schools. This issue will be further reviewed.

- **Funding** (Full Day Kindergarten, Preschool Programs, Summer School, Reduced Pupil/Teacher ratios, and program based staffing)

ACTIONS: A budget increase request was submitted to the Office of the Secretary of Defense by the European and Pacific Commands requesting funding increases to implement

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a full-day kindergarten program, preschool programs, reduce pupil/teacher ratios, and implement DoDEA's program based staffing guidelines. Negotiations are still on-going.

- **Quality of Instruction** (Curriculum Standards, Longitudinal Study). Three issues were identified: Quality of Instruction is poor – Students must repeat material already learned in CONUS; Curriculum Standards are not of high quality – Students are below average in achievement; and rumor is that students at the school are 1 year behind when they return to the states.

ACTIONS: DoDEA agreed that Principals and Superintendents will monitor instruction, identify staff development needs and identify instructional resource material requirements. They are formally observing instruction at a minimum of three times a year. DoDEA has arranged to conduct pre-audits in schools, followed by formal audits of identified schools in

January/February and periodically in all DoDDS Schools thereafter. Additionally, DoDEA has published and is distributing DoDEA Manual 2000.4-1, "DoDDS Curriculum Standards for Language Arts/Reading, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies."

To address how well students perform when they leave DoDDS to return to stateside school systems, DoDEA is researching the possibility of conducting a longitudinal study to provide this data.

- **Customer Satisfaction**

ACTIONS: Stakeholder satisfaction is of extreme importance. DoDEA piloted a new customer satisfaction survey at 100 sites in the Spring of 1998. The results are in and very positive! A DoDEA overview Executive Summary is about to be released that provides a complete synopsis of those areas that parents, students, and out teachers/staff rated as key strengths, as well as outlining those areas where they believe we can improve our stakeholder satisfaction. This summary is the first of three information packages on these survey results. The next look at the data will provide separate summary results for DoDDS Europe, DoDDS Pacific, and DDESS. This is expected to be distributed this month. The final installment will provide a further target of responses by district and schools. The contractor, Gordon S. Black, is expected to have this final segment of information ready by the end of January. During February, DoDEA will be conducting pilot training with a small sample of schools to ensure that the training sessions meet the needs of the communities. Once our training is honed, DoDEA will be providing on-site programs in each community with a school(s) that participated in the survey. This training will help school stakeholders better understand the results and feel comfortable interpreting the data and incorporating it in school improvement planning efforts for the fall, 1999. This spring, DoDEA will continue to measure Benchmark 9.4 of our Community Strategic Plan by surveying the remaining schools that were not included in this original pilot study. A follow-up survey of the original schools will be conducted in the spring of 2000.