



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EDUCATION ACTIVITY

**NEWS RELEASE**

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## DoDEA Awarded \$56.5 Mil for Special Education

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA – The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) today announced the details of its successful request for additional funding to underwrite improvements in its special education program. The funding, which totals \$56.5 million over the next six fiscal years, was awarded through a Department of Defense Program Decision Memorandum. These funds are awarded to address a specific identified need, and cannot be reprogrammed for other uses. The resources will begin to flow into DoDEA at the beginning of the 2004 fiscal year in October 2003, and will provide funding to fill and maintain 114 special education positions for the establishment of assessment teams through September 2010, at which time, the new positions become part of the regular DoDEA manpower allocation. Significant monies will be allocated for equipment and other material resources during the first year and funding for curriculum development and enhancement, professional development for teachers and administrators, and training for parents will be available for all six years.

Everything outlined in this programmatic increase responds to a specific need identified by groups of teachers, parents and community members. As a result of this funding, schools and parents will see enhanced instructional programs for students with disabilities through increased time for collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals, the delivery of services and instruction, and participation in professional development opportunities. Additional curriculum materials, including assistive technology will also be made available in classrooms.

### **Needs Identified**

As part of the annual DoDEA headquarters' monitoring of special education in school year (SY) 2001-02, focus groups were held with DoDEA parents of students with moderate to severe disabilities and with the regular education and special needs teachers working with students with moderate to severe disabilities. This represented the first time such a comprehensive survey of needs and opinions had been conducted by the schools. The responses of those groups were distilled into four major recommendations, which, ultimately, formed the basis for the funding request.

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- 1) **Staffing:** Both parents and teachers reported a need for a reduction in the amount of testing required of special education teachers in order for the teachers to have more instructional time with students.
- 2) **Coordination:** Both groups reported the need for programmed time during which teachers could collaborate with paraprofessionals, and asked for an extension in the daily schedule of paraprofessionals – permitting them to work the same hours and days as teachers – to make such collaboration feasible.
- 3) **Professional Development:** Both groups reported a need for increased professional development in the area of special needs for all educators. Parents and teachers cited the need for more training in effective inclusive practices and in the area of less frequently occurring disabilities, such as mental retardation, autism, and genetic syndromes.
- 4) **Materials / Equipment:** Both groups reported a need for an increase in the amount and type of curriculum materials to include assistive technology.

The recommendations from the focus groups were supported by results from administrator interviews and classroom observations in 30+ DoDEA schools, which were components of the 2002 monitoring of special education programs and services throughout the system.

This information was presented in an official DoDEA monitoring report and was shared with the collaborative team for consideration in the development of a special education request. The collaborative team included parents, DoDEA Area Education Chiefs, special education specialists, union representatives from DoDEA's domestic and overseas schools, representatives of the military commands, and DoDEA headquarters representatives.

### **Additional Funding**

- 1) **Staffing:** The addition of 114 special education positions will support the establishment of assessment teams whose job it will be to do student evaluations to maximize the instructional time special education teachers have with students. The assessment team staff will conduct the majority of testing required in special education, which, in most schools, has been the responsibility of the special education classroom teachers.
- 2) **Coordination with Paraprofessionals:** Additional man-hours were funded to increase the time of special education paraprofessional hours and workdays to provide time for them to collaborate with special and regular education teachers before and after the student school day. In further support of collaboration time, the paraprofessionals will work the same days as teachers. Previously, they did not work on days set aside for teachers meetings, and organizational and training activities.

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- 3) **Professional Development:** An increase in professional development enables DoDEA to deliver extensive professional development to special education teachers, regular education classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators and parents, within a system-wide plan and timeline. Teachers will receive training as new curriculum materials are implemented. Also, pre-service and in-service training and professional development will be provided for the newly established assessment teams.
- 4) **Materials / Equipment:** Funding will be provided for curriculum materials for special education with an emphasis on assistive technology, and reading, mathematics and functional curriculum materials for students with moderate to severe disabilities. It will also fund the purchase of specialized and/or adaptive equipment to support students with physical disabilities.

Over the next few months, the collaborative team that contributed to the additional funding application for special education will develop a detailed budget and implementation timeline for this program.

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